



Sex education in schools

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What is sex education?

Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in schools is a graduated, age appropriate programme which teaches children and young adults about sex, sexuality, emotions, relationships and sexual health. It is based around the three main elements of attitudes and values, personal and social skills, and knowledge and understanding. It aims to be age appropriate, and topics covered may include:

- the importance of marriage and stable relationships
- how to avoid teenage pregnancy
- how to recognise and avoid abuse and exploitation
- skills to avoid being pressured into unwanted or unprotected sex
- the benefits of delaying sexual activity and avoiding risky behaviour
- the importance of safer sex

While SRE includes the teaching of sex, sexuality and sexual health, it does not promote sexual activity, or any particular sexual orientation.

Parents have the right to withdraw their child from their school's SRE programme, except where the lessons form a part of the National Curriculum.

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What is taught, and what is compulsory?

The subjects taught as a part of a school's sex education programme differ across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

England

Under the Learning and Skills Act 2000 in England, a school's SRE policy must be available for parents to inspect. Primary schools are not required to teach SRE other than those elements that fall under the Science curriculum. However, they are required to either have a policy on SRE outlining details of their programme or explaining their reasons for not giving one. Primary school children can expect to be taught the names and functions of external body parts, and be informed about puberty before it begins.

In England, the sex education elements of the Science area of the National Curriculum are compulsory for all pupils of primary and secondary school age (7-16). They include biological aspects of human reproduction, anatomy, puberty, uses of hormones to control fertility and how viruses can affect human health.

At a minimum, information about sexually transmitted infection (STIs) and HIV/AIDS will be taught.

Other elements of sex and relationships education are taught as part of a Personal, Social and Health and Economic Education (PSHE) programme, which may also include subjects such as citizenship and drug and alcohol awareness. However, SRE is not a compulsory part of the national curriculum.

In secondary education, the school governors will be able to provide an up-to-date policy describing the content that your child is taught.

Wales

As in England, primary schools must have either a policy on SRE outlining details of their programme, or a written document explaining their reasons for not providing one. For secondary schools in Wales, SRE is a compulsory part of the basic curriculum.

A wider programme of Personal and Social Education (PSE) has been a compulsory element in Wales in both primary and secondary schools since 2003. From Autumn 2008 a new curriculum of PSE for 7-19 year olds includes health and emotional wellbeing, and encompasses SRE.

Key points for SRE under National Assembly for Wales guidance include:

- preparing both boys and girls for puberty
- preparing girls for menstruation before their periods start
- access to and information about contraceptive information, advice and confidential services
- the moral and emotional aspects of abortion and how to access a relevant agency if necessary
- the risks of STIs, including HIV/AIDS, and information about prevention, diagnosis and treatment
- what safe sex is, and why it is important

Learning outcomes are set for each key stage. From September 2008 schools in Wales should be using a new PSE framework for Key Stage 2 to post-16 year olds.

Scotland

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schools are encouraged to provide SRE within a programme of personal, social and health education or religious and moral education.

Schools in Scotland providing sex education are expected to:

- take into account each child's age, understanding and stage of development
- work in partnership with parents
- ensure procedures are in place for parents to raise concerns
- consult with pupils
- respect cultural, ethnic and religious differences
- respect the different circumstances and needs of all young people

Parents in Scotland may withdraw their children from their school's sex education programme, but are expected to discuss with the head teacher how they intend to provide it in the home.

Northern Ireland

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a legal requirement in Northern Ireland and is taught as part of the Science curriculum and a learning area covering personal development. In secondary schools the RSE programme includes:

- exploring the qualities of relationships, including friendship
- developing coping strategies to deal with challenging relationship issues
- the implications of sexual maturity, including the emotional, social and moral implications of early sexual activity
- developing an understanding of healthy relationships
- assessing and managing risk in real-life relationships
- learning about the roles and responsibilities of parenting

As with SRE in England, Scotland and Wales, all schools in Northern Ireland should have a written policy outlining what is included in their RSE program for parents to inspect.

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What is taught at what age?

Where reproduction is taught as part of the Science curriculum in England, children will be expected to understand the following areas:

5-7 years old

- how animals and humans reproduce, and how their offspring grow into adults
- how to recognise external parts of both the male and female human body
- how to recognise similarities and differences, and to treat others with sensitivity

7-11 years old

- learning about the growth and reproduction processes common to humans and other animals
- stages of the human life cycle

11-14 years old

- learning how the fusion of a male and a female cell causes fertilisation
- the physical and emotional changes that take place during puberty
- the menstrual cycle and how it relates to human reproduction
- how a foetus develops in the uterus

14-16 years old

- how hormonal control occurs, and how sex hormones affect the body
- how hormones are used medically, including both how they control and aid fertility.
- how sex is determined in humans

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Where can I find out more?

The simplest way to find out what is included in your child's SRE/RSE programme is to approach the provider with your questions. This could be your child's head teacher, form tutor, or head of year. Your child's school will have a written policy on their SRE/RSE programme available for you to inspect.

Further information is also available on the following websites:

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) - Sex and Relationship Education Guidance

Website: www.dfes.gov.uk/sre/guidance

Guidance notes for schools on SRE.

SRE & Parents

Website: www.dfes.gov.uk/sreandparents

Information for parents and carers detailing the statutory areas of SRE covered in Science lessons, and for those wishing to find out more about SRE in schools.

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ParentsCentre has been developed by the Department for Children, Schools and Families as a resource to support parents and carers. It contains information on the education and learning and contains forums where you can discuss issues with other parents.

fpa – Factsheet on Sex and Relationships Education

Website: www.fpa.org.uk

The fpa (Family Planning Association) have a factsheet covering the legal framework of SRE/RSE in schools with links to further information and resource

Welsh Assembly Government - Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills

Website: www.wales.gov.uk

On the Welsh Assembly Government website you'll find The Strategic Framework for Promoting Sexual Health in Wales, launched in 2000.

The Scottish Government – Sex and Relationships Education

Website: www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/HLivi/sex-education

General information about Scotland's sexual health strategy and a guide for parents on sex education in schools.

Northern Ireland Executive – Department of Education

Website: www.deni.gov.uk

Northern Ireland's Department of Education website.

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Bare Facts resources for teachers

BBC Schools have created a Teacher's Pack based around the videos on the Bare Facts website. Aimed at Key Stage 3, 4 and post 16 students there are lesson plans and activity ideas.

Visit the [Bare Facts Teacher's Pack](#).

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Everything parents ever wanted their children to know about sex, love and relationships but were too embarrassed to tell them

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