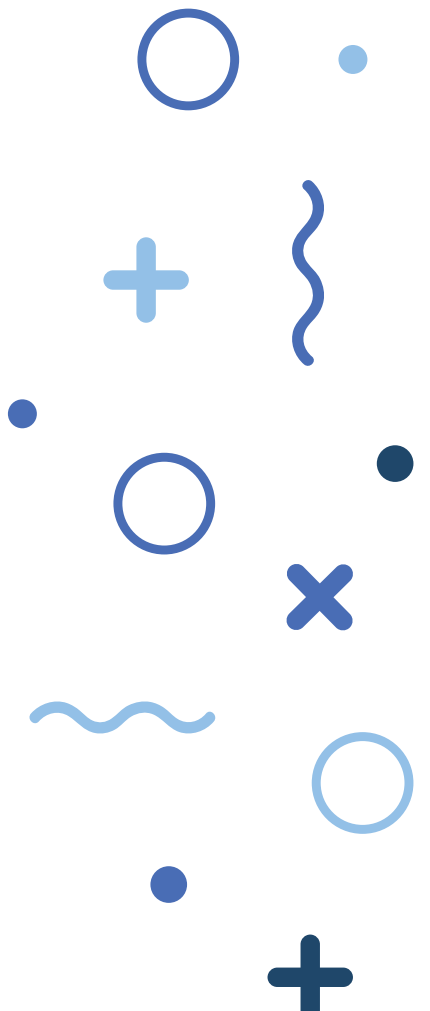




Relationships and Sex Education **Guidance for Teachers**

Disclaimer

We hope you find the information on our website and resources useful. As far as possible, the contents of this resource are reflective of current professional research. However, please be aware that every child is different and information can quickly become out of date. The information given here is intended for general guidance purposes only and may not apply to your specific situation. We recommend using the [statutory guidance](#) to ensure that your school follows legal requirements for the teaching of RSE. As well as this you may find some of the resources listed at the end useful. Please be aware that the inclusion of any link in this resource should not be taken as an endorsement of any kind by Twinkl of the linked website or any association with its operators. You should also be aware that we have no control over the availability of the linked pages. If the link is not working, please let us know by contacting TwinklCares and we will try to fix it although we can assume no responsibility if this is the case. We are not responsible for the content of external sites.

If it's not a subject that you specialise in, it can feel scary to plunge into the world of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) with your students, while ensuring that you are meeting all of the statutory requirements. However, we hope that this guidance, along with our ready-to-use RSE resources, will help put you at ease and make you feel more comfortable about approaching this subject.

Here are some top tips to kick things off:

1. Use parent and student involvement to your advantage.

Parental involvement is an essential part of forming your policy and curriculum as a school (particularly around the [right to withdraw](#)), but it is also worth taking your students' opinions into account. Consulting with students on what they want and need from RSE lessons will help to create a responsive and informed programme of study. Furthermore, discussing how the lessons are going, and being transparent with both parents and students throughout, will help to keep things on the right track. Even if you have already formed your policy and curriculum as a school, it's never too late to gain feedback and consider how this can be put into action in future.

2. Tailor teaching to the needs of your students.

Statutory guidance emphasises the importance of tailoring sessions based on your knowledge of the needs of individual students. This is something that should be taken into account when considering [age appropriateness](#). Your knowledge of your students and how they learn best should inform your planning and delivery of RSE sessions. You should also use your professional judgement and knowledge of the class to decide when it is appropriate for each topic to be discussed.

3. Don't be afraid to not know it all, but be committed to finding out.

You're not expected to know everything about RSE, but it's important to commit to learning more as you go along. The more knowledge you have on a topic, the more comfortable you will feel teaching it, and the easier you will find it to answer questions. A lot of the know-how will come from your own planning and preparation, and finding the answers if you're unsure of something. Our resources will offer you plenty of those answers.

4. Familiarise yourself with the topics that you find difficult.

It's no secret that many of us find the topics covered in RSE difficult to teach. Luckily, we've done a lot of the legwork for you with our ready-to-go lesson packs and plenty of additional RSE resources. In terms of what you can do, it is a good idea to work out how comfortable you are with each of the RSE topics that you are going to be teaching. For those which are out of your comfort zone, we would suggest spending a little more time going over the resources before the lesson, so that you feel fully prepared to approach them with your class.

5. Address why you are teaching RSE.

Statutory guidance states that correct teaching of these subjects can ‘help prepare students for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life’.¹ As well as this, lessons learned through RSE underpin many important values that can be taken into other aspects of school and home life for students. Tell students this, and don’t be afraid to explain why you’re teaching each topic too. The bottom line is that RSE is taught for the health, safety and happiness of our young people, and topics should be explored openly and honestly for this reason.

Safeguarding

When teaching RSE, you should always follow your school’s policies and procedures for safeguarding and seek further guidance from your safeguarding lead if there is cause for concern. It is imperative that you refer any students who require further support. You should be prepared for the discussion of potentially sensitive topics to bring forth new or previously unseen issues in some students. You may wish to establish an agreement that students do not share personal stories, but you should also be aware of any signs that safeguarding action may need to be taken, for example a student knowing much more than their peers about a particular topic. You should also explain how the school safeguarding policy affects confidentiality, so students are aware that any concerns must be reported. See the [Resources](#) section at the end of this guidance for more information on safeguarding.

Age Appropriateness

There may be concern that covering certain topics too early can encourage premature experimentation while covering them too late can result in students seeking out advice from other, less credible sources. For these reasons, it is vital to give careful consideration to when each topic is taught, which will depend greatly on the individual needs of a class.

Factors that can affect age appropriateness include (but are not limited to):

- the developmental stage of students;
- specific learning needs (e.g. those of SEND students);
- location (i.e. students in city-based institutions may need to learn about certain topics earlier than those in rural settings).

Statutory guidance states that topics such as puberty and menstruation should, as far as possible, be addressed before onset, to ensure that students are prepared for the changes that they will experience.²

Age appropriateness should be discussed in depth when creating your school’s RSE policy, whereby you address when topics will be taught to individual classes, specific to your school and students. The less informed young people are, the more vulnerable they are likely to be. If sex and relationships are discussed openly and correctly, this will not encourage promiscuity in students, but in fact ensure they are able to make informed decisions based on facts.

References

¹ [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#), p. 8.

² [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#), p. 88.

Right to Withdraw

Statutory guidance states that parents have the right to request their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education at secondary school (but not from any aspects of relationships or health education) up to and until three terms before the child turns 16.³ While there may be some topics that can be easily divided into these three categories, others may not be as clear cut. It is up to each school to detail in their policy what they define as relationships, sex, and health education, and therefore which lessons parents have the right to withdraw their children from, and why these decisions have been made.

Accept and explain to parents that there will be unavoidable crossovers between topics which should be embraced and not avoided (e.g. sexual relationships), and that students are likely to ask questions that transcend the three categories, something which should be welcomed if the questions are relevant and appropriate to that class.

Consulting with parents when creating your RSE policy and curriculum will help to inform your decisions. The [statutory guidance](#) offers more information around the right to withdraw and how to facilitate these conversations with parents.

Diversity and Inclusion

Statutory guidance states that LGBT+ content should be integrated throughout the RSE programme of study.⁴ However, students must have a comprehensive understanding of what LGBT+ means before this can be achieved. Once students have grasped these concepts, it is the responsibility of the teacher to challenge stereotypes, as well as heteronormativity* and cisnormativity**, during subsequent lessons. It is also vital to consider the needs of different individuals. For example, when teaching about sexual health, you should take gender, sexuality, ethnicity and [special educational needs and disabilities](#) into consideration. Dedication and a willingness to learn from mistakes are required to successfully embed diversity and inclusion throughout RSE lessons.

***Heteronormativity:** Relating to a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation.

****Cisnormativity:** Relating to a world view that promotes cisgender (having a gender identity that matches the sex assigned at birth) as the normal or preferred form of gender identity.

Trigger Warnings

Students should be informed about which topics are coming up before each lesson, in case they feel the need to discuss their attendance with a member of staff. It should be explained

References

³ [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#), pp. 17-18.

⁴ [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#), p. 15.

to students that relationships and sex on the whole can be difficult and awkward to talk about, but that it is often worth persevering through any embarrassment to engage with what is being taught, in order to gain as much as possible from the sessions. That being said, for any particularly sensitive topics, teachers and students should provide trigger warnings before and during the lessons where possible.

Students should also be made aware that some people will feel uncomfortable with certain topics depending on personal experience, and that the purpose of a trigger warning is to prevent harm by allowing those people to prepare themselves emotionally for the content or withdraw from the discussion if necessary.

It may be useful to give examples or make a list with the class of potentially triggering topics to help students to gain a better understanding of this concept. However, be aware that this could lead to students sharing personal stories with the rest of the class, so you may wish to introduce a rule against this before starting. As always, a risk assessment should be carried out for each class and any concerns should be referred to the school's safeguarding lead.

Distancing Techniques

Distancing techniques allow facilitators and students to discuss ideas and answer questions without having to share personal experiences. This is a useful tool to support teaching and learning in RSE (particularly for [SEND students](#)). Our resources include example scenarios to allow you to facilitate discussion without things getting personal. The establishment of a learning agreement can also help with this, as you can refer back to the point about not sharing personal stories.

However, if discussion develops around a specific topic which you are happy to explore further, there are a few useful techniques that can help to distance individual learners from the difficult subject, such as using:

- characters;
- realistic scenarios;
- role play;
- media for learners to respond to.

You can find more information about distancing techniques in the [Resources](#) section at the end of this guidance.

SEND Students

Special educational needs and disabilities may affect the [age appropriateness](#) of particular topics, so it is often better to consider students' level of maturity instead of their chronological age. The pace and exact content of RSE lessons may need to be altered for SEND students, and time taken to revisit particularly abstract topics throughout the programme of study. Try to be as clear and accessible as possible throughout teaching; use correct terminology and avoid jargon, slang and euphemisms, as these can create confusion.

Taking the opportunity to display the basic values that underpin RSE outside of the classroom can help to positively ground ideas such as basic consent and what is appropriate in public vs. private.

For SEND students in mainstream education, additional support in small groups or individually (particularly before a topic is taught in the mainstream classroom) may be required to assist with developmental differences. For students with physical disabilities, additional opportunities to ask questions specific to their needs (as well as tailored resources) will help to ensure that teaching of RSE remains inclusive.

You can find more in-depth information and advice about teaching RSE to SEND students in

Questions

Students should be given plenty of opportunities to ask questions about RSE. We would recommend leaving a considerable amount of time at the end of each lesson for questions, and tailoring the following lessons accordingly if you find that students have more questions than expected. Some topics may need to be split over more than one lesson to allow more time for students to ask questions if necessary.

When answering questions, take time to think about your responses and don't be afraid to not know all the answers; just make sure that you find out and get back to students if this is the case. An anonymous question box is a useful tool that can allow students to ask questions that they don't feel comfortable sharing in front of the class, as well as giving you time to research the correct answers and follow up on this in the next lesson. We've also included Q&As in all of our lesson packs, to help prepare you for any tricky questions that might arise.

Never laugh or be angry at students for asking questions. If a question is not appropriate at a particular time, tell them this, move on and speak to them after the lesson. Students should be made aware of other members of staff that they can go to with any questions or concerns outside of their RSE lessons. See the [Further Support](#) section below for more information around this.

Further Support

It is vital that students are informed about where they can find further help and information around the topics taught in RSE. It should be made clear to students who they can speak to (including members of staff in school) if and when they need further support. They should also be signposted to appropriate websites, helplines and text services that they can access for help or advice.

We would suggest collating both general and topic-specific resources that are suitable for young people to access. These should be signposted in RSE classrooms and around the school via leaflets and posters. You may also wish to display useful websites and phone numbers at the end of each lesson and offer print-outs of these for students to take away with them. Helplines and text services should include both national and local options.

Resources

Documents

[Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education](#) – the Department for Education’s statutory guidance, which includes the legal requirements for RSE, plus links to other resources.

Websites

- [Beyond RSE Resources](#)
- [Brook UK](#)
- [Sex Education Forum](#) – contains useful information about **distancing techniques** and **RSE for students with SEND**.
- [PSHE Association](#)
- [NSPCC Learning](#) – contains useful information about **safeguarding**.
- [Mencap](#) – for information around **SEND**.