

Sexual Relationships Q&A

Below are some common questions which may arise during teaching of this topic, along with suggested answers.

Please ensure that you follow your school's safeguarding policy when dealing with sensitive topics, and pass on any welfare concerns or disclosures from students.

Q: What does it mean to have a sexual relationship?

This should be covered during the lesson but can be recapped to help with understanding.

A: Sexual relationships involve sexual intimacy and are usually characterised by feelings of lust, but can also involve love. A sexual relationship can be alongside another type of relationship, for example a romantic relationship (but doesn't have to be); this might make the sexual element of the relationship more loving. Aside from this, being sexual in a relationship can exist alongside many other characteristics, such as being life partners, giving emotional support, living together and so on.

Q: At what age should I be having sex/sexual relationships?

The age of consent is covered in the PowerPoint but can be recapped here.

A: In the UK, the legal age of consent is 16. This means that, legally, a person under 16 cannot consent to sexual activity because they are seen as not having the capacity to do so. The law applies to everyone, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Over the age of 16, there is no specific age that you 'should' be having sex; it is each individual person's choice and varies greatly between people. Some people may choose to have sex as soon as they turn 16, while others may wait to have sex until they are in their 20s, 30s, or later. Some people may also choose to never have sex. All of these choices are valid.

It is important to remember that the law is designed to protect young people from abuse, harm or being taken advantage of. If someone is under the age of 16 and decides to have sex anyway, it is still vital that them and their partner(s) consent to sex in every other capacity. In the eyes of the law, someone under the age of 13 is not seen as old enough to consent to sex. Any sexual activity with someone under 13 is illegal and viewed as rape, sexual abuse or assault. If you are under the age of 13 and thinking of having sex, it is a good idea to talk to someone you trust first about this.

Q: What is the right number of people to have had sex with?

A: There is no right or wrong number of people to have had sex with. Although there is often stigma around this number, in reality, it does not reflect who someone is as a person, as long as the people who are having sex together are of age and fully consenting.

Q: What are the differences between platonic, romantic and sexual relationships?

A: Platonic relationships are usually defined as a deep love or friendship which is based primarily on companionship and shared interests. They don't involve sexual relations and often involve physical intimacy such as hugs and being physically close to one another (but don't have to).

Romantic relationships are usually characterised by a deep, passionate love which is often associated with strong feelings of nervousness and excitement, including 'butterflies'. A romantic relationship can be alongside a sexual relationship (but doesn't have to be) and often involves a level of physical intimacy that is not present in other relationships (but this is not always the case).

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There are also queerplatonic relationships, which blur the lines between all three of these. They feature intimacy and closeness between partners and could be romantic or non-romantic. They might involve kissing and sex, just one of these or neither of them. You may rarely find two QPRs that are the same.

Q: Are relationships which are only sexual less important than other types of relationships? Do the same rules still apply?

A: While some people may feel that relationships which are only sexual are less important to them than other types of relationships, others may not. This depends entirely on the people in the relationship, and it shouldn't matter as long as everyone involved is in agreement.

How important or serious a relationship is to you, however, should not affect whether or not you treat the person/people with respect. We may see examples in the media and society of people showing little or no respect towards people whom they have only sexual relations with, but this is not okay. All relationships, casual or not, should include open communication, consent, respect, trust and kindness.

Q: Is it bad to have sex outside of a romantic relationship?

A: While some people may prefer to have sex only in romantic relationships, others may not. Neither of these is right or wrong. It is important to form relationships in ways that suit you best, no matter what other people might be doing, as long as everyone involved is happy, in agreement and fully consenting.

Q: Can you separate sexual attraction and romantic interest?

A: Some people prefer to (and do) separate sexual attraction and romantic interest within some or all of their relationships, while others prefer to have relationships with people where they are both sexual and romantic together. Some relationships may also start off as either sexual or romantic, and then progress into being both. None of these ways is the 'correct' way; it depends entirely on the people in the relationship and we shouldn't judge others for their relationship choices.

Some people also vary in the kind of people they are sexually attracted to and romantically interested in. For example, someone might be bisexual (sexually attracted to two or more sexes or genders) and homoromantic (romantically interested in only people of the same sex or gender). The most important thing is that the people in the relationship are on the same page and are clear in communicating what they are looking for in that specific relationship.

Q: What are the differences between heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, pansexual and asexual?

A: These are some of the most common sexual orientations, but there are plenty more with which people identify. Someone who is sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex or gender may identify as heterosexual, whereas someone who is sexually attracted to people of the same sex or gender may identify as homosexual. Someone who is sexually attracted to two or more sexes or genders may identify as bisexual, and someone who does not have a sex or gender preference when it comes to sexual attraction may identify as pansexual. Finally, someone who is not romantically interested in any person of any sex or gender or anyone may identify as asexual.

Q: What if I am made to feel bad or guilty for my relationship choices?

A: Although it may feel like there are set ideas of what particular relationships look like, and although it is true that some kinds of relationships are rarer than others, it does not mean that any specific kinds of relationships are more or less valid than others (despite what some people may think). Some of the key things that make relationships healthy are honesty, trust and communication (among others). As long as the people in the relationship are all happy with the arrangements, there doesn't need to be a problem.

Some people may choose to base aspects of their relationship on traditional ideas and values, but this won't be the same for everyone, and it certainly doesn't determine whether a relationship is acceptable or not. If you are being made to feel this way, you may wish to explain to the person/people that although your relationships might look different, this is because you are different people, and it doesn't mean that one way is better than the other. You may also choose to distance yourself from the person/people or think about whether you want to continue to have a relationship with them if it is causing you pain.

Q: Other people are getting involved in my relationship when I don't want them to. What do I do?

A: It can be really difficult if people who aren't part of your relationship are getting involved when you don't really want them to, and it can sometimes cause (or contribute towards) problems within the relationship. If you find that this is becoming an issue, the best thing you can do is have a conversation with your partner(s) about this, explain what the issue is and how it is making you feel, and try to come up with a solution which suits everybody. This might mean coming to a compromise so that everyone's feelings about the situation are taken into consideration. It might also mean having a conversation with the person or people who you feel are becoming too involved, in a way that is respectful of their feelings too.

Q: I think I have sexual feelings towards my friend. What do I do?

A: Having sexual feelings towards people, especially when going through puberty, is very normal. Even if it is someone who you haven't previously thought about in this way, it is not necessarily anything to be ashamed of. However, it is worth thinking about whether or not you want to act on these feelings, and how you might go about this. Firstly, you might find it useful to consider whether you actually want to have sex with the person/people or not. If you don't wish to act on these feelings, it is likely that they will just go away on their own with time.

If you are considering acting on these feelings, then it is best to think about why this is, to work out whether your reasons behind this are healthy, and whether you're definitely ready to have sex. If you decide that you are ready to have sex and are over the age of consent, then you might wish to talk to the person/people about it, but it is important to remember that they may not feel the same way, and this should be respected if it is the case. It can feel painful if you have sexual feelings towards someone who does not feel the same, but remember that this is just one person, and this situation doesn't determine how other people will feel about you in the future.