

# Relationships and Sex Education

A guide for Christian parents in England



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# Contents

Introduction	4
<hr/>	
1. What does the new law require?	5
2. What is the content of the new subjects?	6
3. Six ideas that may influence your child's school	14
4. Can I withdraw my child from this teaching?	21
5. Sex Education or Relationships Education?	23
6. Including Christian views	24
7. Teaching about LGBT issues	25
8. Parents' input	27
9. Tips for engaging with schools	28
<hr/>	
Appendix	32
References	34

# Introduction

## **The law on sex education in schools in England is changing in September 2020. This applies to all schools, state-funded and fee-paying.**

We explain in sections 1 and 2 of this guide what the Government is asking schools to cover in this new teaching. There are good things that can be taught under the new arrangements but also concerning elements.

Unfortunately, the changes provide an opportunity for campaign groups opposed to Christian teaching to push forward their controversial agendas in schools. Many Christians believe this will be harmful for both their children and society in general. Section 3 sets out some of these views so you can be alert to them, raise concerns where necessary and equip older children to critique them.


The law and Government guidance give good opportunities for Christian parents to engage constructively with schools. This can help protect their own children and encourage schools to adopt an approach which will benefit all.

The remainder of this booklet provides guidance on how to do that, as well as your right to withdraw your children from some parts of the teaching.

Christian parents will want to establish their young children in the truth and make sure they are protected from teaching which could skew their developing view of the world.

Parents with older children and teenagers will want them to know that Christian views are acknowledged and respected, whilst enabling them to critically consider other views that exist in contemporary Britain. They will also want to protect them from temptations they could face from cavalier approaches to sex education.

UK and international human rights law,<sup>1</sup> as well as the Bible,<sup>2</sup> recognises that parents are the primary educators of their children. Although parents don't have a blanket veto over what a school teaches, they have an important say.

 *The Department for Education has said that schools may postpone teaching until the start of the 2021 summer term, if they need to in the light of COVID-19.*

# 1. What does the new law require?

There are different requirements for **PRIMARY** and **SECONDARY** schools:

- **PRIMARY SCHOOLS** must teach **Relationships Education** to all pupils. They may also choose to teach **Sex Education**.
- **SECONDARY SCHOOLS** must teach **Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)**.

This applies to **all** schools in England, including fee-paying schools.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, all state-funded schools will have to teach **Health Education** (similar requirements are already in place for fee-paying schools). Health Education for state-funded **PRIMARY SCHOOLS** includes content related to puberty (see Appendix at the end of this guide). Schools which contain a mix of primary *and* secondary-age pupils must provide for their primary-age pupils as a primary school would and for their secondary-age pupils as a secondary school would.<sup>4</sup>

The new subjects of **Relationships Education, RSE** and **Health Education** are not part of the National Curriculum, so there is no detailed programme of study that sets out the content. This gives individual schools freedom to adopt an approach which suits the families they serve and flexibility to respond to parents' concerns.<sup>5</sup> Statutory guidance requires schools to ensure that their policy "*meets the needs of pupils and parents and reflects the community they serve*".<sup>6</sup> There are however some basic requirements set out in the law.

In both **PRIMARY Relationships Education** and **SECONDARY RSE**, pupils must learn:

- *the nature of marriage and civil partnership and their importance for family life and the bringing up of children*
- *safety in forming and maintaining relationships*
- *the characteristics of healthy relationships*
- *how relationships may affect physical and mental health and well-being*<sup>7</sup>

If a **PRIMARY SCHOOL** chooses to deliver **Sex Education**, it must also encourage pupils to have "*due regard to moral considerations and the value of family life*", including learning "*the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children*".<sup>8</sup>

## 2. What is the content of the new subjects?

**In addition to the law, schools are obliged to have regard to statutory guidance. This explains the legal requirements schools must abide by and lists content it says schools should include.**

The guidance applies from September 2020 until August 2023. Schools can only depart from it with a good reason.

**This guidance defines the subjects as follows:**

### **PRIMARY Relationships Education**

The 'focus' of **Relationships Education** "should be on teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships, with particular reference to friendships, family relationships, and relationships with other children and with adults". There is nothing in the content set out for primary schools about sexual relationships (apart from what is implied by talking about families). It is only in secondary **RSE** that "what makes a... successful marriage<sup>9</sup> or other type of committed relationship", "contraception, developing intimate relationships" and consent in sexual relationships are included.<sup>10</sup>

**Relationships Education is not Sex Education**

The guidance groups the content for primary schools into five areas:

We have highlighted wording that may be particularly helpful to concerned Christians.

Government guidance

#### **Families and people who care for me**

- that families are important for children growing up because they can give love, security and stability.
- the characteristics of healthy family life, commitment to each other, including in times of difficulty, protection and care for children and other family members, the importance of spending time together and sharing each other's lives.

- that others' families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children's families are also characterised by love and care.
- that stable, caring relationships, which may be of different types, are at the heart of happy families, and are important for children's security as they grow up.
- that marriage represents a formal and legally recognised commitment of two people to each other which is intended to be lifelong.
- how to recognise if family relationships are making them feel unhappy or unsafe, and how to seek help or advice from others if needed.

### *Caring friendships*

- how important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends.
- the characteristics of friendships, including mutual respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, generosity, trust, sharing interests and experiences and support with problems and difficulties.
- that healthy friendships are positive and welcoming towards others, and do not make others feel lonely or excluded.
- that most friendships have ups and downs, and that these can often be worked through so that the friendship is repaired or even strengthened, and that resorting to violence is never right.
- how to recognise who to trust and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, managing conflict, how to manage these situations and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed.



## Respectful relationships

- the importance of respecting others, even when they are very different from them (for example, physically, in character, personality or backgrounds), or make different choices or have different preferences or beliefs.
- practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships.
- the conventions of courtesy and manners.
- the importance of self-respect and how this links to their own happiness.
- that in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due respect to others, including those in positions of authority.
- about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders (primarily reporting bullying to an adult) and how to get help.
- what a stereotype is, and how stereotypes can be unfair, negative or destructive.
- the importance of permission-seeking and giving in relationships with friends, peers and adults.





## **Online relationships**

- that people sometimes behave differently online, including by pretending to be someone they are not.
- that the same principles apply to online relationships as to face-to-face relationships, including the importance of respect for others online including when we are anonymous.
- the rules and principles for keeping safe online, how to recognise risks, harmful content and contact, and how to report them.
- how to critically consider their online friendships and sources of information including awareness of the risks associated with people they have never met.
- how information and data is shared and used online.

## **Being safe**

- what sorts of boundaries are appropriate in friendships with peers and others (including in a digital context).
- about the concept of privacy and the implications of it for both children and adults; including that it is not always right to keep secrets if they relate to being safe.
- that each person's body belongs to them, and the differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe physical, and other, contact.
- how to respond safely and appropriately to adults they may encounter (in all contexts, including online) whom they do not know.
- how to recognise and report feelings of being unsafe or feeling bad about any adult.
- how to ask for advice or help for themselves or others, and to keep trying until they are heard.
- how to report concerns or abuse, and the vocabulary and confidence needed to do so.
- where to get advice e.g. family, school and/or other sources.<sup>11</sup>

## SECONDARY Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)

The Department for Education says **RSE** is about giving “young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships. It should enable them to know what a healthy relationship looks like and what makes a good friend, a good colleague and a successful marriage or other type of committed relationship. It also covers contraception, developing intimate relationships and resisting pressure to have sex (and not applying pressure)... what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in relationships.”<sup>12</sup>

**RSE** teaching in **SECONDARY SCHOOLS** is expected to include the material from **PRIMARY Relationships Education** and in addition, the following:

We have highlighted wording that may be particularly helpful to concerned Christians.

### Government guidance

#### **Families**

- that there are different types of committed, stable relationships.
- how these relationships might contribute to human happiness and their importance for bringing up children.
- what marriage is, including their legal status e.g. that marriage carries legal rights and protections not available to couples who are cohabiting or who have married, for example, in an unregistered religious ceremony.
- why marriage is an important relationship choice for many couples and why it must be freely entered into.
- the characteristics and legal status of other types of long-term relationships.
- the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to raising of children, including the characteristics of successful parenting.
- how to: determine whether other children, adults or sources of information are trustworthy: judge when a family, friend, intimate or other relationship is unsafe (and to recognise this in others' relationships); and, how to seek help or advice, including reporting concerns about others, if needed.

## Respectful relationships, including friendships

- the characteristics of positive and healthy friendships (in all contexts, including online) including: trust, respect, honesty, kindness, generosity, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships. This includes different (non-sexual) types of relationship.
- practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships.
- how stereotypes, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (e.g. how they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice).
- that in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due respect to others, including people in positions of authority and due tolerance of other people's beliefs.
- about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help.
- that some types of behaviour within relationships are criminal, including violent behaviour and coercive control.
- what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable.
- the legal rights and responsibilities regarding equality (particularly with reference to the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010) and that everyone is unique and equal.<sup>13</sup>



## ***Online and media***

- their rights, responsibilities and opportunities online, including that the same expectations of behaviour apply in all contexts, including online.
- about online risks, including that any material someone provides to another has the potential to be shared online and the difficulty of removing potentially compromising material placed online.
- not to provide material to others that they would not want shared further and not to share personal material which is sent to them.
- what to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online.
- the impact of viewing harmful content.
- that specifically sexually explicit material e.g. pornography presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners.
- that sharing and viewing indecent images of children (including those created by children) is a criminal offence which carries severe penalties including jail.
- how information and data is generated, collected, shared and used online.

## ***Being safe***

- the concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, and how these can affect current and future relationships.
- how people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent, and how and when consent can be withdrawn (in all contexts, including online).

## *Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health*

- how to recognise the characteristics and positive aspects of healthy one-to-one intimate relationships, which include mutual respect, consent, loyalty, trust, shared interests and outlook, sex and friendship.
- that all aspects of health can be affected by choices they make in sex and relationships, positively or negatively, e.g. physical, emotional, mental, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing.
- the facts about reproductive health, including fertility, and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women and menopause.
- that there are a range of strategies for identifying and managing sexual pressure, including understanding peer pressure, resisting pressure and not pressurising others.
- that they have a choice to delay sex or to enjoy intimacy without sex.
- the facts about the full range of contraceptive choices, efficacy and options available.
- the facts around pregnancy including miscarriage.
- that there are choices in relation to pregnancy (with medically and legally accurate, impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help).
- how the different sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including through condom use) and the importance of and facts about testing.
- about the prevalence of some STIs, the impact they can have on those who contract them and key facts about treatment.
- how the use of alcohol and drugs can lead to risky sexual behaviour.
- how to get further advice, including how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment.<sup>14</sup>

# 3. Six ideas that may influence your child's school

**Government guidance does not require schools to support any of the following ideas, but some schools may choose to. Others may be bamboozled into doing so by misleading advice from special interest groups promoting their own agenda.**

In fact, schools are not permitted to push any particular ideology in their teaching. Teaching on contentious topics must be objective, critical and plural. (For more information, see section 3 of our publication *Equipped for equality* – [the.ci/e4e](https://www.the.ci/e4e))

Baroness Berridge, a schools minister, stated: “the statutory guidance sets out that schools should assess each resource that they propose to use carefully to ensure it is appropriate for the age and maturity of pupils and sensitive to their needs. Schools should also be aware of their duties regarding impartiality and balanced treatment of political issues in the classroom to ensure content is handled in an appropriate way”.<sup>15</sup>

## A. Secularism

Secularism is the view that God and religion should be removed from the public square in favour of a supposedly neutral position, so that individuals and society can decide their own rules without being bound by religious beliefs. This can lead some teachers to think that parents' and children's religious beliefs are irrelevant to school policy.

But in reality, a secular perspective is not neutral. It is a point of view. As discussed in this booklet, the Government guidance on **Relationships and Sex Education** tells schools to have due regard for religious belief.

**Government guidance on Relationships and Sex Education tells schools to have due regard for religious belief**

Secularists won't always disagree with everything Christians believe. Their consciences can still speak and lead to them agreeing with Christians on the need to protect children from inappropriate materials. They may also accept objective evidence on the benefits of marriage and faithfulness.



## B. Rejection of objective morality

Two World Wars broke down class barriers and a culture of unthinking deference. But the rejection of Christianity took this much further. It led to an increasing disdain for authority and made people nervous about asserting right and wrong.

When it comes to schools, this rejection of authority can especially be seen when they teach about moral issues. The need for children to have boundaries imposed is downplayed. Promoting self-discipline is seen as a stifling and restrictive concept.

The rejection of external boundaries has led to an emphasis on internal feelings as the only guide to how we should live. It's thought important to live 'authentically', being true to one's inner self, above all other considerations.

Some schools might try to use these new subjects to promote such views, for example:

### EXAMPLE

#### What have you learned from Relationships and Sexuality Education?

Primary school pupil: *"Be yourself, and if anyone judges you, don't listen to them and just do whatever you want."*<sup>16</sup>

Doing whatever you want is a recipe for selfishness and hurt. Most parents spend a considerable amount of time raising their children to not be selfish, to put others before themselves, to be patient, and to see that what they want is often not what is best for them or for others. As Christians we know that our desires are often wrong, that our lives are best lived in obedience to God and that loving our neighbour is far better than doing whatever we want.

## C. Identity politics

Identity politics sees society as divided into 'privileged' identity groups (such as heterosexual white males) and 'oppressed' identity groups (such as transgender women of colour).<sup>17</sup> It teaches that these privileged groups have created society's boundaries which have functioned to oppress others. According to this view, the job of all 'right-thinking' people is to destroy these boundaries, including Christian beliefs about sexual morality and the family.

Identity politics downplays rational debate, seeing any truth claim as an assertion of power. Rational or not, views expressed by a member of a privileged group are regarded as acts of oppression and bigotry. But views expressed by someone in an oppressed group, particularly about their identity, must be accepted as true.



This is especially the case in the area of sex and gender. Since the LGBT community is considered an oppressed group, identity politics makes the promotion and acceptance of LGBT agendas a moral imperative.

🔗 See our **Identity politics** leaflet for more: [the.ci/identitypolitics](https://the.ci/identitypolitics)





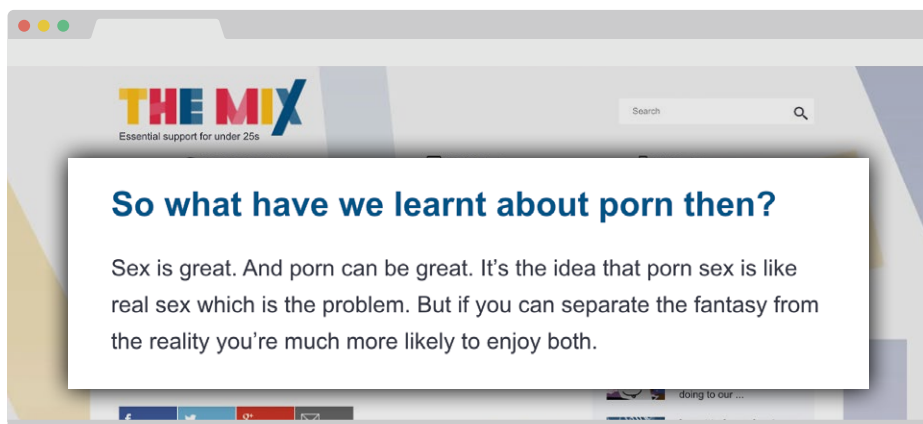
## D. 'Sex positive' Sex Education

Christians agree that sex within marriage is part of God's good creation. In contrast 'sex positivity' holds that any and all sex acts must be affirmed and celebrated, providing there is consent and precautions are taken to minimise risks to physical health.<sup>18</sup> It teaches that norms and boundaries for sexual behaviour must be undermined. This can lead to schools presenting an extensive menu of sexual practices, sometimes involving multiple partners, as if all are morally equivalent. The legal age of consent may be acknowledged but often the impression is given that it only matters where there is a significant difference in the age of the participants. Cavalier attitudes to what is age-appropriate are common.

Sex positive approaches to **pornography** refuse to acknowledge that it is immoral or harmful. Because pornography is widely viewed by teenagers, it is thought to be important to address it in lessons. Advocates say that the primary aim is to help pupils recognise what is fantasy and what would genuinely be mutually pleasurable in a real sexual relationship. This can involve presenting the full range of sexual activities portrayed in pornography to pupils, whether or not they have actually been exposed to it, and implying that there is nothing wrong in watching it. Moral considerations over inflaming lust in the viewer and the treatment and degradation of those involved in the production of pornography are set aside. Although this can be presented as the school taking a morally neutral stance, in practice the message is given that viewing pornography is good, healthy and normal, providing the viewer recognises it is not a realistic portrayal of real-life sex.

✔ *The Mix website – recommended to secondary school teachers by the Sex Education Forum<sup>19</sup>*

*Respect Yourself website's "Sextionary"<sup>20</sup> – by Warwickshire County Council, now removed (censored by The Christian Institute)* ➔



## Bukakee

This is a term usually found only on pornography and adult sex sites. It refers to a sexual practice where a woman will generally kneel in a circle of men who will one-by-one ~~penetrate her (vagina) with their penis~~ ~~insert their penis~~. Some people are horrified by the idea of this action and see it as degrading, whereas others who chose to partake say that it is a liberating experience.

## Fetish

Technically a fetish is classified as a 'sexual deviance', which doesn't really explain anything... The trouble with that definition is that it presupposes that when it comes to sex there is a normal... there isn't!

## Rainbow kiss

This... has many different variations... they all have to do with sharing sexual fluids through kissing after oral sex. Sometimes confused with snowballing – when a guy ~~comes in his partner's mouth and then~~ ~~spits his semen~~ back into his (or someone else's mouth). Fluids mixed can include ~~semen, vaginal fluid, menstrual (period)~~ blood...

## Spit roast

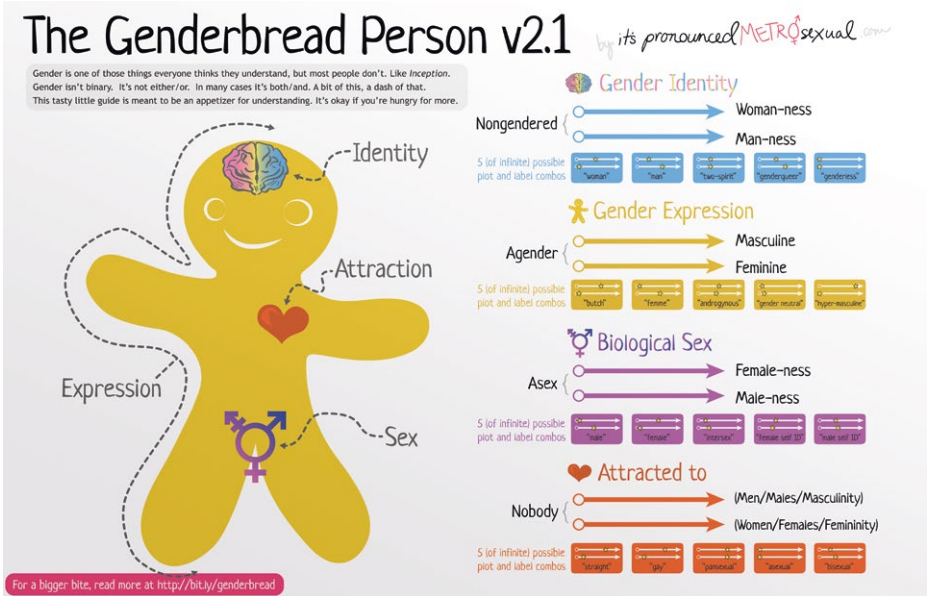
Usually involves two men having sex with a woman at the same time, one ~~uses mouth~~ and one ~~uses penis~~. ~~One would be having sex with her (vagina) while the other strokes a blow job~~

## E. Transgender ideology

Instead of understanding male or female as biological facts about a person, this movement sees gender as something you feel or decide. So someone who is biologically male may actually be female. Transgender ideology develops this further so that someone could be 'non-binary', i.e. neither male nor female, if they feel themselves to be so. Or they could see themselves as male and female in varying degrees.

So sex, gender, and sexual and romantic attraction are said to each exist on a 'spectrum'.

- ✔ **The Genderbread Person v2.1** – A diagram sometimes used in schools to summarise Transgender Ideology<sup>21</sup>



- ✔ **Mermaids gender spectrum** – A presentation slide from transgender group Mermaids, posing the question: "Where on a spectrum might your gender identity be?" It uses the scale "1 Barbie" to "12 G.I. Joe".<sup>22</sup>

## F. Feminism

There are several different types of feminism.

**Second wave or Radical feminism** emerged in the 1960s and argues that women are oppressed not just by unfair laws but by social norms created by men – the ‘patriarchy’. These feminists are usually strongly in favour of abortion and lesbian rights. But they agree with the Christian belief that women should be respected as human beings and not seen as sex-objects. So they oppose pornography. Although many believe sex education is a means to empower women, they can share Christian concerns about sex education where it normalises sexual practices that are degrading for women and girls.

Radical feminists also agree that a biological male cannot be a woman just by claiming to be one. They are deeply concerned that the transgender movement is allowing men to define what it means to be a woman. They see this as undermining laws that prohibit sex discrimination and important social conventions that protect women, such as female-only toilets and changing rooms, as well as women’s sport.

**Third wave or Liberal feminism** emerged in the 1990s. Unlike Radical feminists who reject pornography, prostitution and transgender ideology, they emphasise a woman’s right to express herself sexually in whatever way she wants without criticism, including ‘acting’ in pornography. When ‘third wavers’ talk about ‘gender equality’, this often includes the idea that people who identify as transgender have the right to be treated according to their ‘gender identity’, rather than according to their biological sex.

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✔ **Gender Watch Bingo** – An example of third wave feminism in school RSE materials<sup>23</sup>



# 4. Can I withdraw my child from this teaching?

**Yes, from the sex education elements – but there are other options before reaching this point.**

In many cases, a parent's first step will be to try to have a positive impact on what the school does teach (see section 8 of this guide). Withdrawing your child is an important backstop protection but it does nothing to protect other children and will potentially expose your own child to hearing some of the content 'second hand' through other children in the playground.

The law specifically requires schools to excuse **PRIMARY**-age pupils from some or all **Sex Education** if a parent requests this.<sup>24</sup> This is an absolute requirement.

If parents of **SECONDARY**-age pupils request that their child be withdrawn from the **sex education element of RSE**, schools must grant this request unless there are exceptional circumstances. However, if your child is three terms or fewer away from their sixteenth birthday and tells the school he or she wants to receive the lessons despite your objections, then statutory guidance requires the school to provide **Sex Education** for one of those three terms.<sup>25</sup>

The automatic right of withdrawal **does not** apply to **Relationships Education**, the **relationships element of RSE**, **Health Education**, or the content of the **National Curriculum for Science** (see Appendix at the end of this guide).<sup>26</sup> However, whether or not the right of withdrawal applies depends on the *content* of what the school is teaching, not what the lesson is called.

The right of withdrawal reflects the fact that issues around Sex Education are sensitive and a wide variety of viewpoints exist amongst parents. The right of withdrawal from **Sex Education** is a means of preventing parents' views being undermined by schools. In the areas of the curriculum where there is no automatic right of withdrawal, it is therefore even more important that schools do not promote viewpoints with which parents may disagree: teaching must be "*objective, critical and pluralistic*".<sup>27</sup> For more information, see our publication *Equipped for equality*.

***The right of withdrawal from Sex Education is a means of preventing parents' views being undermined by schools.***

## Right of withdrawal summary

Age	Relationships Education or <i>relationships element of RSE</i> <i>(friendships, families, safety)</i>	Sex Education or <i>sex education element of RSE</i> <i>(intimate &amp; sexual relationships, including sexual health)</i>	Health Education in state-funded schools <i>(including internet safety, puberty and menstruation)</i>	National Curriculum Biology
5-11	No	Yes	No	No
11-14	No	Yes, other than in exceptional circumstances	No	No
15	No	As 11-14, but child can opt in for one term	No	No
All	Explicit requirement that teaching must be appropriate to the child's age and religious background			Focus should be on empirically verifiable science
	Teaching must be objective, critical and plural			



# 5. Sex Education or Relationships Education?

**It is important to recognise that Relationships Education is not Sex Education.**

Campaigners failed in their attempt to pressure the Government into introducing compulsory sex education for all children in **PRIMARY SCHOOLS**. Parliament voted for laws which will make **Relationships Education** compulsory and keep **Sex Education** as an option for primary schools to teach if they wish to, with a right for parents to withdraw their children. Determining what is **Relationships Education** and what is **Sex Education** thus becomes an important issue. A school must not disguise **Sex Education** under another subject heading so that it effectively denies parents the legal right Parliament has given them.

For example, a school might claim **Sex Education** just means education about the mechanics of sexual reproduction and this is the only element from which parents have a right of withdrawal. That cannot be true, because the basic biology of human reproduction is included in the **National Curriculum** (see Appendix at the end of this guide), from which there is no right of withdrawal. If the school was correct, it would effectively mean there was no right of withdrawal at all.

A misguided school might claim **Sex Education** only means teaching about menstruation and puberty and try to restrict the right of withdrawal to those areas, whilst teaching other sexual matters elsewhere. Again, that cannot be correct because these areas are included in **Health Education** in state-funded schools, from which there is no right of withdrawal.

For the legislation which affords parents a right of withdrawal to be meaningful, it must apply to any education about sexual relationships or sexual activity, except the factual content in the **National Curriculum**.

The outline of content contained in the guidance (see section 2 of this guide) is also helpful in making the distinction. "*Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health*" is only included in **SECONDARY RSE**, not in **PRIMARY Relationships Education**. This clearly implies that topics under this heading should be classed as **Sex Education** and the right of withdrawal applies.



## 6. Including Christian views

**When schools provide education on these subjects, they are required by law to do so in a way which is “appropriate having regard to the age and the religious background of the pupils”.<sup>28</sup>**

Parental consultation is a key opportunity to help schools understand pupils’ religious backgrounds (see section 8 of this guide). The statutory guidance for schools also notes the importance of positive relationships between the school and local faith communities to create a constructive context for the teaching of these subjects. This is a good opportunity for church leaders to build relationships with schools and help them understand religious viewpoints, assisting schools in fulfilling their legal duty.

According to the guidance, a ‘non-faith’ school may teach pupils about the Christian perspective and ‘balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious’.<sup>29</sup>

The obligation to provide education in a way which is appropriate to pupils’ religious background applies to all schools. But there are further requirements for schools with a registered religious position. They must provide education in accordance with those religious beliefs: for example, a Church of England school in accordance with the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion. The Church of England holds to the belief that sex should only take place within a heterosexual marriage.<sup>30</sup> This does not mean the school cannot discuss other views, but as a minimum it must explain the view which accords with its religious foundation and hold that up as a belief worthy of consideration. Many long-established schools in England have Christian charitable objects. The law requires these schools to use their resources only in pursuit of the ‘objects’, which are the purposes of the charity.





# 7. Teaching about LGBT issues

**The Department for Education has confirmed that there is no specific requirement for **PRIMARY SCHOOLS** to teach about LGBT issues.**

On the first version of its Frequently Asked Questions for parents, it stated:

5 April 2019

**Q: Will these subjects promote LGBT relationships?**

A: No, these subjects don't 'promote' anything, they educate.

...Primary schools are enabled and encouraged to cover LGBT content if they consider it age appropriate to do so, but there is no specific requirement for this. This would be delivered, for example, through teaching about different types of family, including those with same-sex parents.<sup>31</sup>

This was changed on 5 November 2019 to:

5 November 2019

**Q: Will my child be taught about LGBT relationships?**

A: Pupils should be taught about the society in which they are growing up. These subjects are designed to foster respect for others and for difference and educate pupils about healthy relationships.

Pupils should receive teaching on LGBT content during their school years. Teaching children about the society that we live in and the different types of loving, healthy relationships that exist can be done in a way that respects everyone. Primary schools are strongly encouraged and enabled to cover LGBT content when teaching about different types of families.<sup>32</sup>

However, the original version remains a true reflection of the law and statutory guidance, which remained the same before and after the update. Whilst the new wording has a different emphasis, it does not contradict the original wording. It merely reflects a change in how the Department for Education has chosen to explain its policy, not a change in the policy itself.



**SECONDARY SCHOOLS** are expected to teach about LGBT issues and to do so in an integrated manner within their RSE programme, on the grounds that their provision must be relevant to all pupils.

It will be hard for parents to successfully object to their children being taught factual information. This includes teaching on the legal provision for same-sex marriage and abortion and the existence of same-sex relationships and same-sex parenting within society. However, these topics should only be addressed when age-appropriate and the presentation should be sensitive to pupils' religious backgrounds.

It is not for the school to promote any particular viewpoint and it should acknowledge the range of views that exist. The British Social Attitudes Survey showed that in 2018, one in six agreed that sexual relations between two adults of the same sex was "always" or "mostly wrong".<sup>33</sup> Amongst parents in some parts of England, the proportion will be significantly higher. More people will disagree with same-sex marriage and even more with transgenderism. Schools must take this into account.

Teachers are free to sensitively share their personal opinion in an appropriate context, for example in response to a question,<sup>34</sup> but should not seek to use their position to promote their view.

# 8. Parents' input

## Schools are required by law to consult parents when drawing up their policy and whenever they review it.

The coronavirus pandemic may have prevented some schools from consulting when they had planned to, but it remains a legal requirement that this is done before the school writes its policy. The Department for Education has said that schools may postpone their first teaching of **RSE** until the start of the summer term 2021 if necessary to fulfil their statutory duties, which include consulting parents.<sup>35</sup> The policy will usually be posted on the school's website and must be made available on request to parents. From September 2020, it must be made available to anyone interested in seeing it, including prospective parents.<sup>36</sup>

The consultation should not be a 'tick-box' exercise. According to the statutory guidance, the purpose is to *"ensure that the policy meets the needs of pupils and parents and reflects the community they serve"*.<sup>37</sup> This implies that the school should be responsive to parents' concerns. The Department for Education has specifically made clear that it expects **PRIMARY SCHOOLS** to carefully consider parents' views before taking reasonable decisions about their policy on **Relationships Education**.<sup>38</sup> It is by consulting parents that the school can ensure it fulfils its legal duty to provide education appropriate to the religious background of pupils. *"Clear information"* must be provided for parents on the subject content<sup>39</sup> and schools should *"provide examples of the resources that they plan to use"*.<sup>40</sup>

The Department for Education recommends that **PRIMARY SCHOOLS** continue to engage with parents on their **Relationships Education** policy on a regular basis.<sup>41</sup>

When teaching the subjects, **PRIMARY** and **SECONDARY** schools *"should ensure that parents know what will be taught and when"*<sup>42</sup> and *"be given every opportunity to understand the purpose and content of Relationships Education and RSE"*. There should be *"opportunities for parents to understand and ask questions about the school's approach"*.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to consulting all parents when making or changing policy, if a **PRIMARY SCHOOL** chooses to deliver **Sex Education**, then it should consult the parents whose children will receive it before it is taught.<sup>44</sup>

Teaching needs to take account of the developmental differences between children.<sup>45</sup>

# 9. Tips for engaging with schools

- **Don't assume a school will be hostile to a Christian perspective.** All schools should, and most schools will, welcome constructive comments from parents and consider them carefully.
- **Because schools are educating children on behalf of parents, there should never be a problem with the school sharing with you a scheme of work and any materials it uses to teach your child.** If a state school persists in refusing to allow you sight of these, you can write to the school listing what you would like copies of and explaining that you are making a request under the 'Freedom of Information Act'.
- **If you are unable to attend a consultation meeting, don't assume this means you don't have a voice.** Schools understand that parents have different time commitments and good practice requires them to provide a range of means for parents to have an input.<sup>46</sup> Be proactive in seeking engagement with the school.
- **If you are expressing specific concerns about teaching on LGBT issues, don't make any assumptions about teachers' understandings of Christian belief.** They may only have heard distorted versions from those opposed to Christian sexual ethics. Of course, you will want to explain your concerns about the promotion of secular views of identity, human fulfilment and sexual morality in school. But it may also be helpful to explain that you want your child to grow up to respect and love all people, without exception, and not to look down on others as if they are morally inferior. In doing so, you also provide the teacher with language they can use to relay your concerns to others at the school.
- **Respect teachers' expertise but don't assume they will have read the guidance thoroughly or be aware of the law.** It can be helpful to take copies of key documents with you to a meeting so you can draw specific sections to the attention of the school.

- **Sometimes head teachers are unaware of issues and will take action immediately to stop questionable practice once parents raise concerns.** Others will make reasonable accommodation for children from Christian families. But sometimes senior leaders at a school may have a cause they wish to promote. Remember that you are the parent and have responsibility as the guardian of your child. Be respectful and courteous but firm and clear. Don't give the school a pretext to dismiss your concerns because you come across as unreasonable or offensive.
- **Although your right to be consulted doesn't amount to an absolute veto over what the school teaches, you can insist that the school abides by the law and only departs from the statutory guidance where it has very good reasons to do so.** If the school persists in breaching these requirements, a formal written complaint can be helpful. Schools must have a complaints policy or procedure which is made available to parents. It is commonly posted on the school's website. If you have followed the school's complaints process in full and you are still not happy with the school's response, you can take your complaint to the Department for Education. The Christian Institute may be able to assist parents who have acted reasonably in pursuing their complaint.
- **It is the job of the head teacher and governors in every school to make decisions about Relationships and Sex Education: it is *their* legal responsibility, not the local authority's.** In some maintained schools, there is still considerable deference to the local authority. You may find head teachers trying to hide behind controversial documents produced by the local authority. But the local authority cannot tell schools what to teach. In these cases, you may need to insist that the school takes these responsibilities seriously and exercises independent judgement.
- **If you have a one-to-one meeting at which any commitments are made verbally, it is helpful to follow up with an email to the teacher thanking them for the meeting and summarising what was agreed, creating a written record you can hold the school to.**
- **Don't be put off if the school cites Christian leaders who disagree with your position.** A school's duty to provide education suitable to the religious background of your child relates to that particular religious background, not a generic 'Christian' view, defined by the people the school chooses to cite.
- **Christian beliefs about relationships are rational and consistent with much evidence on the benefits of marriage.** Pupils should not be denied knowledge of these facts for some of the most important decisions they will make in their lives. You can make evidence-based arguments and say that a school's teaching should be similarly evidence-based. However, do not play down the religious element as this engages particular duties the school holds.

- **In addition to considering your child's religious background, you can insist a school with a religious position acts consistently with its beliefs (see section 6 of this guide).** You can find out whether the school has a particular religious designation or ethos by searching for the school name or postcode using the Department for Education's online "Get Information about Schools" service.<sup>47</sup> It is worth ensuring you are familiar with the official position of any religious body the school is connected with. If you are contradicted by someone who denies that is the position, be clear and calm. Make plain that it is not for you or any individual to redefine the denomination's position.
- **As well as focusing on what you don't want the school to teach, look at the positive teaching schools are required to deliver and make sure schools are delivering that.** There is a great deal that is helpful, and the more helpful teaching there is, the less emphasis can be given to problematic content.
- **Ask if there are any external organisations who will be helping deliver the school's teaching or which have provided materials the school is using.** Find out more about them.
- **If a number of parents share the same concerns, this will carry more weight with the school.** It is good to discuss concerns with other parents and encourage one another, but it is important not to create hostility.

The well-publicised situation at two Birmingham schools has muddied the waters. It was claimed the Equality Act required these primary schools to promote diversity and celebrate difference, including in sexual orientation and gender identity.<sup>48</sup> This is wrong. However, school inspectors and commentators said that the parent protests were stirred up by activists who had wider agendas, and that they misrepresented what was being taught in the schools. To what extent that is fair criticism is a matter for debate.

Whatever the truth, this has resulted in the Department for Education issuing advice to schools aimed at preventing such organised opposition. Because of this guidance, when teachers hear a complaint about **Relationships Education** some might fear the creation of a loud protest outside the school gates, or suspect campaign groups are attempting to stir up contention behind the scenes. Others might use the advice as a shield to dismiss all complaints from parents as irrational.

It is important not to personalise any disagreement and to stick to the facts. Keep coming back to the school's legal obligations. Be meticulously accurate in any statements about what is being taught at **your child's** school.

If you feel there is a risk that your actions could be misrepresented, make clear that you will not start any protests outside the school gates.

Encourage parents to engage with the school, but don't adopt an unnecessarily confrontational stance. Argue on the basis of the school's legal duties and, whilst helping one another, encourage other parents to express their concerns in their own words.



# Appendix

## National Curriculum Biology content

Fee-paying schools, academies, free schools, studio schools and university technical colleges are not required to teach the National Curriculum ([gov.uk/national-curriculum](http://gov.uk/national-curriculum)) but where these schools do choose to teach it, parents have no automatic right of withdrawal.

The National Curriculum for Science requires that children in **year 5 of PRIMARY SCHOOL** are taught to “describe the life process of reproduction in some plants and animals” and to “describe the differences in the life cycles of a mammal, an amphibian, an insect and a bird”. Humans may be included as mammals. They should also be taught to “describe the changes as humans develop to old age”, which is likely to include puberty.<sup>49</sup>

In **SECONDARY SCHOOLS**, the National Curriculum for Biology includes “reproduction in humans (as an example of a mammal), including the structure and function of the male and female reproductive systems, menstrual cycle (without details of hormones), gametes, fertilisation, gestation and birth, to include the effect of maternal lifestyle on the foetus through the placenta” by the **end of year 9** and “hormones in human reproduction, hormonal and non-hormonal methods of contraception” by the **end of year 11**.<sup>50</sup>

These are part of science teaching, so the focus should be on factual content related to the mechanisms of reproduction.

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## Health Education content on topics related to sexuality

The requirement to teach **Health Education** applies only in state-funded schools, although fee-paying schools may choose to include similar content as part of their statutory duty to provide Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education.

**By the end of PRIMARY SCHOOL pupils should know:**

- key facts about puberty and the changing adolescent body, particularly from age 9 through to age 11, including physical and emotional changes.
- about menstrual wellbeing including the key facts about the menstrual cycle.



Schools should continue to develop knowledge on topics specified for primary as required and in addition cover the following content by the **end of SECONDARY** :

- key facts about puberty, the changing adolescent body and menstrual wellbeing.
- the main changes which take place in males and females, and the implications for emotional and physical health.
- (late secondary) the benefits of regular self-examination and screening.<sup>51</sup>

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## Further reading

**Equipped for equality** – Our publication gives more information on schools' broader duties under Equality and Human Rights Law. Schools must comply with these requirements in all their teaching, including teaching related to relationships and sex.



Read now: [the.ci/e4e](https://www.the.ci/e4e)

For hard copies email [info@christian.org.uk](mailto:info@christian.org.uk) or phone **0191 281 5664**

## Department for Education (DfE) Frequently Asked Questions

The Government has provided a helpful 'Frequently Asked Questions' page for parents available online at [bit.ly/dfe-faqs](https://bit.ly/dfe-faqs)

## DfE parents' guides

The DfE has produced two parents' guides, one aimed at parents of **PRIMARY**-age children and one aimed at **SECONDARY**. Some schools will distribute these to parents but they are also available online at [bit.ly/rshe-guides](https://bit.ly/rshe-guides)

## DfE guidance

The full statutory guidance for schools is available online at [bit.ly/rse-guidance](https://bit.ly/rse-guidance)

## DfE advice for consulting parents

Further advice for schools on consulting parents is available online at [bit.ly/rse-parents](https://bit.ly/rse-parents)

## **DfE advice on the Equality Act 2010**

Available online at [bit.ly/dfe-equalityact](https://bit.ly/dfe-equalityact)

## **DfE advice on British values**

Available online at [bit.ly/dfe-britishvalues](https://bit.ly/dfe-britishvalues)

## **EHRC Technical Guidance for Schools in England on Public Sector Equality Duty**

Available online at [bit.ly/psed-schools](https://bit.ly/psed-schools)

# References

- <sup>1</sup> Education Act 1996, section 9; European Convention on Human Rights, Protocol 1, Article 2; United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 18
- <sup>2</sup> E.g. Deuteronomy 6:1-9 and Ephesians 6:4
- <sup>3</sup> The Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, Schedule, para. 7
- <sup>5</sup> *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers*, Department for Education, 2019, para. 114
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, para. 13
- <sup>7</sup> Section 80A of the Education Act 2002 as amended in September 2020 by the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, Schedule, para. 8
- <sup>8</sup> Education Act 1996, section 403, subsections 1 and 1A
- <sup>9</sup> Department for Education, *Op cit*, page 13
- <sup>10</sup> Department for Education, *Op cit*, paras 54 and 69
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, para. 62
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, para. 69
- <sup>13</sup> For more information, see our publication 'Equipped for equality'
- <sup>14</sup> Department for Education, *Op cit*, para. 81
- <sup>15</sup> House of Lords, Written Answers, 29 July 2020, HL7174

- <sup>16</sup> ITV News Wales report on trial of new Relationships and Sexuality Education scheme, 22 May 2018
- <sup>17</sup> Heyes, C, 'Identity Politics', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2018 Edition)*, see <https://stanford.io/32p5Dhm> as at 17 August 2020
- <sup>18</sup> Ivanski, C, and Kohut, T, 'Exploring definitions of sex positivity through thematic analysis', *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 26(3), December 2017, pages 216-225
- <sup>19</sup> 'The pornography issue', *The Sex Education Supplement*, 1(1), April 2013 (note: 'The Site' referred to has been renamed 'The Mix')
- <sup>20</sup> 'The Sextionary', *Respect Yourself*, 24 June 2018, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3aZxfOc> as at 17 August 2020
- <sup>21</sup> *The Genderbread Person*, see <https://bit.ly/2YuDqEi> as at 17 August 2020
- <sup>22</sup> Image available at <https://bit.ly/3gkYHXv> as at 17 August 2020
- <sup>23</sup> *Agenda Online*, see <https://bit.ly/3aPkHZF> as at 17 August 2020
- <sup>24</sup> Education Act 1996, section 405
- <sup>25</sup> Department for Education, *Op cit*, para. 47
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, paras 49-50; Education Act 1996, section 405
- <sup>27</sup> *Lautsi v Italy* (2012) 54 EHRR 3
- <sup>28</sup> Section 80A of the Education Act 2002 as amended in September 2020 by the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, Schedule, para. 8
- <sup>29</sup> Department for Education, *Op cit*, para. 21
- <sup>30</sup> The official position of the Church of England is to "affirm the biblical and traditional teaching on chastity and fidelity in personal relationships is a response to, and an expression of, God's love for each one of us, and in particular affirm: 1) that sexual intercourse is an act of total commitment which belongs properly within a permanent married relationship; 2) that fornication and adultery are sins against this ideal, and are to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion; 3) that homosexual genital acts also fall short of this ideal, and are likewise to be met by a call to repentance and the exercise of compassion; 4) that all Christians are called to be exemplary in all spheres of morality, including sexual morality, and that holiness of life is particularly required of Christian leaders." Sexual morality 1987 Synod motion in *Report of the House of Bishops: Working Group on human sexuality*, Church House Publishing, November 2013, para. 102. This position has recently been restated in *Civil Partnerships – for same sex and opposite sex couples. A pastoral statement from the House of Bishops of the Church of England*, House of Bishops, December 2019, para. 9
- <sup>31</sup> *Relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education: FAQs*, Department for Education, 5 April 2019, retrieved from <https://bit.ly/3aVLbZA> as at 17 August 2020
- <sup>32</sup> *Relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education: FAQs*, Department for Education, 5 April 2019, see <https://bit.ly/3aS3COx> as at 17 August 2020
- <sup>33</sup> 'Dataset: British Social Attitudes Survey, 2018' *British Social Attitudes Survey*, see <https://bit.ly/2Et2dlt> as at 18 August 2020
- <sup>34</sup> *The Equality Act 2010 and schools: Departmental advice for school leaders, school staff, governing bodies and local authorities*, Department for Education, May 2014, paras 3.17-3.32
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- <sup>36</sup> Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019, Schedule, para. 8
- <sup>37</sup> *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers*, Department for Education, 2019, para. 13
- <sup>38</sup> *Parental Engagement on Relationships Education*, Department for Education, 2019, page 2
- <sup>39</sup> Department for Education, *Op cit*, para. 38
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, para. 24
- <sup>41</sup> *Parental Engagement on Relationships Education*, Department for Education, 2019, page 3
- <sup>42</sup> Department for Education, *Op cit*, para. 41
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, para. 42
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, para. 67
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, foreword (page 4), paras 35, 64 and 67
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, para. 43
- <sup>47</sup> <https://bit.ly/3lfy4w>
- <sup>48</sup> Moffat, A, *No Outsiders in Our School: Teaching the Equality Act in Primary Schools*, Speechmark Publishing, 2016, page 26
- <sup>49</sup> *National curriculum in England: science programmes of study*, Department for Education, 6 May 2015
- <sup>50</sup> *Loc cit*
- <sup>51</sup> *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers*, Department for Education, 2019, paras 96 and 103



# Relationships and Sex Education

A guide for Christian parents in England

**The law on sex education in schools in England is changing in September 2020.  
This applies to all schools, state-funded and fee-paying.**

There are good things that can be taught under the new arrangements but unfortunately the changes also provide an opportunity for campaign groups opposed to Christian teaching to push forward their controversial agendas in schools.

The law and Government guidance give opportunities for Christian parents to engage constructively with schools, both to protect their own children and to encourage schools to adopt a positive approach which will benefit all.



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