



Young People's  
Health Partnership

## **Changes to the teaching of Relationships & Sex Education (RSE) and Personal, Social, Health & Economic Education (PSHE)**

**Young People's Health Partnership (YPHP) response to call for evidence**

### **Contents**

<b>Primary Schools .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Secondary Schools.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Safe Online Relationships .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Consulting Parents .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Needs of Individual Pupils.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>About YPHP &amp; the Health &amp; Wellbeing Alliance .....</b>	<b>5</b>

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*This response was drafted in relation to the Department of Education's call for evidence on how to improve RSE and PSHE and make sure pupils are getting the information they need to thrive in the modern world. The background for the call for evidence can be found [here](#).*

*We drafted our response in line with the PSHE Association's response to the call for evidence which can be found [here](#).*

## **Primary Schools**

**Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

Relationships education taught as part of PSHE should cover a range of areas including healthy relationships, preparing for puberty, safety within relationships, online / social media safety, dealing with challenges in relationships, communication skills, consent and rights, health literacy etc. These subjects overlap and it is not helpful to rank the importance of one over another. They are all focused on supporting children to develop the skills they need to establish and sustain healthy relationships and to identify safe and trusted sources of support.

**Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.**

PSHE is best delivered around a number of core themes which are revisited each year with age appropriate content. Core themes should be focused on throughout primary and secondary school but with increased content and complexity as young people grow and develop. From our perspective a focus on all aspects of health and wellbeing is vital throughout primary and secondary school. This should include physical and mental health, health literacy, online and offline safety, physical activity, relationships, healthy eating etc.

A holistic approach to young people's PSHE curriculum is important as this is how young people see their own health and wellbeing. In our extensive engagement work with young people they show us how important it is to have an integrated holistic approach. A more holistic approach set within a whole school approach allows teachers to build on learning, reflect what is important to young people and respond to their increasing independence particularly as they near the end of their primary education.

Many primary schools already provide successful PSHE education and statutory status is important to ensure equal access for all children and young people to this essential learning.

## **Secondary Schools**

**Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age**

**groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

RSE in secondary schools should support young people to develop and maintain healthy, positive relationships, make informed choices about their sexual health and wellbeing, and know how to access information and support. Building on learning from primary school the secondary curriculum should reflect today's realities and provide age appropriate content. Key subject areas for consideration from a health perspective are listed below – these are interconnected and for a comprehensive approach all are important to cover during secondary school:

- Healthy relationships
- Abuse, Child Sexual Exploitation and grooming
- Consent
- Gender
- Diversity
- Sexual health
- Online safety
- Mental wellbeing and relationships

Peer influence is growing at this part of the life course and has the potential for positive as well as negative influences on young people. Promoting positive and supportive peer relationships should be part of the curriculum. The Association for Young People's Health, [Be Healthy project](#) worked with young people affected by sexual exploitation and provides important evidence of the power of supportive peer work as well as evidence of the interconnected nature of relationships, wellbeing and health for young people who have experienced significant adverse experiences in their lives.

Effective RSE must be delivered within the context of broader PSHE education supporting young people to understand the links between for example: alcohol, drugs and safe relationships. Although many schools provide this already statutory status for PSHE education would enable all young people to access this important and necessary learning.

**Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.**

In secondary schools PSHE plays a critical role in supporting young people as they develop through adolescence and into adulthood. There is clear evidence that high quality PSHE has a positive impact on young people's physical and mental health, relationships, safety, academic attainment and employment prospects, with the greatest benefits experienced by the most disadvantaged pupils.

To deliver these benefits PSHE must be a comprehensive programme of learning across many important issues including mental health and wellbeing, alcohol and substance use, diet and exercise, relationships, online safety and sexual violence. However it is not a series of topics but instead a subject which develops knowledge and skills that young people need

to be healthy and able to manage the complexities of adult life. This requires teachers trained in PSHE, regular lessons and assessment of pupils' learning. Many schools support this time and resource and statutory status is necessary to ensure high quality provision in all schools and equal access for all young people.

### **Safe Online Relationships**

**Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?**

There are aspects of safe online relationships which fall outside of RSE e.g. online privacy, online identity, impact of online and social media platforms on mental health and wellbeing, body image and self-esteem, how to ensure you can trust online information, young people's rights online etc. Teaching young people about online aspects of all relationships must be part of a wider PSHE curriculum. Such a curriculum needs to provide young people with the skills they need to excel and be safe in a digital world.

Digital information and support can be protective for young people's wellbeing so any curriculum should focus on the assets that technology can bring for young people alongside increased understanding and skills to deal with the risks.

### **Consulting Parents**

**How should schools effectively consult parents on RSE so they can make informed decisions that best meet the needs of their children, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?**

Delivering PSHE including RSE in partnership with parents and carers, students and the school is important to ensure that it is as effective as possible. Parents and carers should have access to the school's RSE approach and an outline of the age appropriate curriculum for each year group.

It is also vital to listen to young people's voices on RSE and PSHE. As they develop young people's needs change and they may not always have the same views as their parents. Young people are deemed Fraser competent normally in their mid/late teens (often age 16). Competence enables them to take their own decisions about their health and see health professionals independently. Young people can feel uncomfortable speaking to their parents about sex and relationships. Evidence in 2015 from Natsal-3 demonstrated that lessons at school were seen by young people age 16-24 as their preferred source of information about sex when growing up.

Whilst the majority of parents and carers fully support the young people in their care it is important to recognise that some young people live in challenging family contexts. PSHE and RSE are vital to help schools safeguard these young people. High quality RSE may be the only source of information for some young people about healthy relationships and how to get support so it should not be possible for parents and carers to take their children out of these classes.

## **Needs of Individual Pupils**

**How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?**

PSHE can support young people's ability to understand their health and how they can look after themselves. Health literacy and self-care approaches delivered as part of PSHE have the potential to support good health behaviours throughout adult life. A comprehensive PSHE curriculum is important to achieve this but schools should have flexibility within this framework to design PSHE programmes which respond to their local needs. However every young person is entitled to a comprehensive programme and core elements should not be excluded for any reason.

PSHE has the potential to be particularly beneficial for marginalised young people facing health inequalities. For families without the skills and resources to provide the support that young people need good PSHE is vital to support young people's wellbeing. PSHE also provides a space in the school curriculum for health professionals to contribute to young people's wellbeing. From school nurses to primary care practitioners it can support effective community links between schools and health services to benefit all young people. Such links help to deliver protective programmes such as immunisation, mental health support and healthy eating and activity approaches linked to local and national public health priorities.

A core curriculum based on clearly understood principles and statutory status for PSHE is necessary to allow all schools to prioritise the subject and ensure their teachers have skills to plan and deliver a high quality PSHE curriculum.

### **About YPHP & the Health & Wellbeing Alliance**

*YPHP represents the interests of young people and young adults aged 10-25. We are a partnership of six voluntary sector organisations working to improve young people's health outcomes in a variety of different ways. We represent a wide network of organisations working in the sector. We are part of the Department of Health/PHE/NHSE voluntary sector Health & Wellbeing Alliance. The YPHP is led by the Association for Young People's Health (AYPH).*

