

Sex Education in the UK

This document offers extended content to the Sexuality E-Learning Module in Core Competencies for Paediatric Palliative Care. Discusses the need for sex education of disabled and chronically ill young people and explains sex education provided in schools (UK, 2011). Also discusses confidentiality in this context and gives links to helpful resources to identifying age appropriate information.

Introduction – Disabled and Chronically Ill Patients need Sex Education, too

- There is strong evidence that health care professionals generally dismiss or undervalue discussion of non-life threatening aspects of any disease
- Health Care Professionals often feel ambivalent about discussing sexuality with young people with life-limiting conditions as this might be seen to imply a focus on the future and thereby provokes fears of upsetting the parent or the child
- Parents often are equally reluctant to discuss sexuality with their child for fear of upsetting them, giving them false hopes, encouraging early sexual experimentation and out of a tendency to keep child overprotected and immature
- Young Person may have missed opportunities for formal and informal sex education through absence from school and other social situation
- Many teenagers with chronic illness and disabilities are sexually active and if not, they usually have the same social and sexual aspirations as their peers.
- Evidence shows that effective sex education does not encourage early sexual experimentation
- It is considered a fundamental human right to have access to family planning education and services (see sexual health rights in earlier section)
- Professional may need to help anxious parents to let go and promote independence

Sex Education in British Schools

The Education Act 1996 requires that sex education should inform pupils “about STIs and HIV and encourage pupils to have due regard to moral considerations and family life”. It is therefore compulsory for schools to teach the biological aspects of puberty, reproduction and the spread of viruses and infection. These topics are mandatory as part of the National Curriculum for Science which is taught to all pupils of primary and secondary school age.

The broader subject of sex and relationship education (SRE) is currently not compulsory in schools even though schools are recommended to offer it (SRE Guidance DfEE 0116/2000) as part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship. In practice, the majority of schools do provide at least a certain amount of sex and relationship education (SRI) as part of their PSHE Curriculum. What is included in SRI is variable from school to school. Both primary and secondary schools must have an up-to-date policy that describes the content and organization of SRE taught outside the Science Curriculum. If the decision is taken not to teach non-compulsory SRE components this also needs to be

documented by the school. Each school's governing body is responsible for developing their school's policy and making sure it is made available to parents. Different sources of support exist to guide schools in the process of developing their policy and curriculum, for example from the local PSHE advisors based in local government and the Sex Education Forum (see Resources).

Parents have the right to withdraw their children from SRE taught outside the Science Curriculum. Recent surveys show that 90% of parents and 93% of school governors support the teaching of SRE in schools. (2010 Report: SRE- Views from teachers, parents and governors.

<http://www.nga.org.uk/uploadfiles/SRE%20Education%20Views%20from%20teachers%20parents%20and%20governors.pdf>)

In general terms, Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) helps students to learn about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health. It seeks to equip children and young people with the information, skills and positive values to have safe, fulfilling relationships, to enjoy their sexuality and to take responsibility for their sexual health and well-being.

The Sex Education Forum stipulates that good quality SRE should:

- Start early in childhood and continue throughout life
- Be accurate and factual covering a comprehensive range of information about sex, relationships and sexual health
- Be positively inclusive in terms of gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, culture, age, faith, belief, HIV status, pregnancy and other life experiences
- Include the development of skills that enable personal responsibility, support healthy relationships and ensure good communication about sex and relationships
- Promote critical awareness of different social and peer norms and values
- Nurture the development of clear values based on mutual respect and care
- Ensure that children and young people are clearly informed where they can get confidential advice and support

Although SRE supports young people to delay early sexual activity, secondary schools also have a duty to promote the well-being of those pupils who, for whatever reason, experience early and often unprotected sex.

Confidentiality

Teachers in schools are not in a position to guarantee absolute confidentiality. They must have a good working knowledge of their school's confidentiality and safeguarding policy and ensure that pupils understand what might happen to any personal information they might disclose in the class room.

All schools have a legal duty to safeguard the welfare of children and young people. This means that if there it is suspected or established that sexual activity involves abuse or exploitation, this activity needs to be reported in line with the child protection policy.

Some schools have developed additional contractual obligations that require staff to report all disclosures of sexual activity, regardless of circumstance. *Information about alternative sources of confidential support should be provided to students.*

In terms of the legal background concerning young people's capacity to consent to sexual activity, the legal age for consent is 16 and sexual activity of young people aged 16 or above is generally deemed unproblematic. The law also does not wish to criminalize younger people who are in a mutual sexual relationship. While it may be appropriate to consider whether the welfare of a young person aged 13-15 may be at risk through early mutual sexual activity, there is not a legal requirement to report it. However, a child aged 12 or under is never deemed capable of consenting to sexual activity and any such activity needs to be reported.

See: Sex Education Forum. Confidentiality in Schools Factsheet
http://www.ncb.org.uk/PDF/sef_ff_38.pdf for more detailed information

Further Information:

Main Reports & SRE Overviews

- Department for Education and Employment (2000) Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (<http://www.education.gov.uk/publications//eOrderingDownload/DfES-0116-2000%20SRE.pdf>)
- Ofsted (2002) Report on Sex and Relationship Education <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Education/Curriculum/Personal-social-health-and-economic-education/Primary/Sex-and-relationships-education-in-schools>
- What is taught in schools? Summary of learning outcomes Ofsted Report of Sex and Relationships (2002). <http://www.swish.org.uk/?q=parents/school>
- Family Planning Association (2010) Factsheet Sex and Relationships Education http://www.fpa.org.uk/media/uploads/professionals/pdf_sex_relationships_and_education_factsheet_jan_2011.pdf
- Sex Education Forum (2008). Young People's Survey on SRE – Key Findings http://www.ncb.org.uk/dotpdf/open_access_2/sef_youngpeoplesresurvey_briefing.pdf
- Sex and Relationship Education – Views from teachers, parents and governors (2010) <http://www.nga.org.uk/uploadfiles/SRE%20Education%20Views%20from%20teachers%20parents%20and%20governors.pdf>

- Sexual Behaviour Facts
http://www.fpa.org.uk/media/uploads/professionals/pdf_sexual_behaviour_factsheet_apr_2009.pdf
- Sex Education Fact Sheet
http://www.fpa.org.uk/media/uploads/professionals/pdf_sex_relationships_and_education_factsheet_jan_2011.pdf
- <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/pdfs/GrowingUpTeachers.pdf>
- British Association for Sexual Educators <http://www.baseuk.org/>

Age-appropriate curriculum & resources

These summaries can be very helpful in thinking about what information may be appropriate to the development of a young person in our care.

Primary

- Sex Education Forum (2001) Sex and Relationship Education for Primary Age Children, http://www.ncb.org.uk/dotpdf/open%20access%20-%20phase%201%20only/ff28_sef_2001.pdf
- Sexual Education Forum. SRE Curriculum Content Age 3-6
http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/questions_to_explore/ages_3-6.aspx
- Sexual Education Forum SRE Curriculum Content Age 7-8.
http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/questions_to_explore/ages_7-8.aspx
- Sexual Education Forum SRE Curriculum Content Age 9-10
http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/questions_to_explore/ages_9-10.aspx
- Sexual Education Forum SRE Resource List for Primary Schools
<http://www.ncb.org.uk/PDF/Resource%20List%20-%20Primary.pdf>
- Sexual Education Forum. Samples of Lesson Outlines for Primary Schools.by year
http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/sow-primary.aspx

Secondary

- Sexual Education Forum SRE Resource List for Secondary Schools
<http://www.ncb.org.uk/PDF/Resource%20List-%20Secondary.pdf>
- Sexual Education Forum SRE Curriculum Content Age 11-13
http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/questions_to_explore/ages_11-13.aspx

- Sexual Education Forum SRE Curriculum Content Age 14-16
http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/questions_to_explore/ages_14-16.aspx
- Sexual Education Forum SRE Curriculum Content Age 16+
http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/questions_to_explore/ages_16.aspx
- Sexual Education Forum. Samples of Lesson Outlines for Secondary Schools and 16 + http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef/resources/curriculum_design/sow-secondary.aspx

Disability & Special Needs

- Sex Education Forum Factsheet on SRE for Children and Young People with Learning Disabilities (2004) http://www.ncb.org.uk/dotpdf/open%20access%20-%20phase%201%20only/ff32_sef_2004.pdf
- Sexual Education Forum SRE Resources Special Needs and Disability
http://www.ncb.org.uk/PDF/Resource_List_Special_needs_Disability.pdf
- Sexuality Education for Youth with Disability and Chronic Illness. A Resource List.
<http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/disabsex.htm>
- Canadian Council on Learning (2010). Best practice on sexuality education for children and young people with physical disabilities. <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/pdfs/FundedResearch/EsmailFullReport.pdf>
- NICHCY (1992) Sexuality Education for Children and Youth with Disabilities. -
<http://www.nichcy.org/InformationResources/Documents/NICHCY%20PUBS/nd17.pdf>
- Owens, T. (2011). Sex Education for Physically Disabled Teenagers.
<http://www.outsiders.org.uk/leaflets>

Parents

- Sex Education Forum (2001). Talk to your children about sex and relationships, Support for parents http://www.ncb.org.uk/dotpdf/open%20access%20-%20phase%201%20only/ff31_sef_2001.pdf
- Sexual Education Forum Resource List Parents and Carers
http://www.ncb.org.uk/PDF/Resource_List_Parents_carers.pdf
- <http://www.cafamily.org.uk/pdfs/GrowingUpParents.pdf> also add in parents section

Other

- Personal, Social, Health & Economic Education (PSHE) Association.
<http://www.pshe-association.org.uk/> for list of resources and local advisors

- Birmingham Health Education Service ('Centre of Excellence' with national reputation in the planning and delivery of PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and Citizenship education initiatives <http://www.bgfl.org/bgfl/71.cfm>
- Sex Education Forum Factsheet on Faith, Values and Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) (2004)http://www.ncb.org.uk/dotpdf/open%20access%20-%20phase%201%20only/ff_faith02_sef_2005.pdf