



Department
for Education

Curriculum planning for Relationships, Sex and Health Education in secondary schools as part of education recovery

June 2021

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Summary

This publication provides non-statutory guidance from the Department for Education. It has been produced to support relationships, sex and health education curriculum planning in secondary schools, as part of education recovery.

Expiry or review date

This advice will be kept under review and updated as necessary.

Who is this publication for?

This advice is intended to sit alongside the statutory guidance on Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education. It is therefore aimed at:

- governing bodies of maintained schools (including schools with a sixth form) and non-maintained special schools
- trustees or directors of academies and free schools
- proprietors of independent schools (including academies and free schools)
- management committees of pupil referral units (PRUs)
- teachers, other school staff and school nurses
- head teachers, principals and senior leadership teams
- Diocese and other faith representatives
- for reference for relevant local authority staff

Introduction

All secondary schools are required to provide relationships, sex and health education to all secondary age pupils from September 2020.

We know that the covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing. It is particularly important at this time for schools to listen to their pupils, to ensure they understand what their main concerns are, as this can play an important role in informing Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum planning as part of recovery.

To support this, the Mental Health in Education Action Group has provided guidance below on a range of issues that we know children and young people have been concerned about throughout the pandemic:

- Not being able to socialise with family and friends
- Sleep problems
- Bullying
- Friendships (including on transition to new education settings)
- Staying safe online

This advice includes information on which modules from the curriculum cover these topics and how to approach teaching about this content, as well as providing links to additional resources and support.

It is not intended to replace the need to assess any gaps in pupils' knowledge, either due to pupils forgetting things they had previously been taught, or due to content that was not delivered because of the pandemic. It is also important to consider how this content can be complemented by other areas of the curriculum, assemblies, form-time and by extra-curricular activities.

Public Health England also provides general tips and guidance about supporting mental wellbeing for teachers:

- [Mental wellbeing | Top tips | PHE School Zone](#) advice for teachers on supporting parents and carers with the mental wellbeing of their children, including the importance of routine and normalising discussions around mental wellbeing.
- [Every Mind Matters Guidance on learning in a safe environment.pdf \(pshe-association.org.uk\)](#) useful guidance for teachers on delivering learning in a safe environment including protecting vulnerable students and providing effective responses to sensitive questions.

Concern: Not being able to socialise with family and friends

Relevant curriculum modules

- [Families](#)
- [Respectful relationships including friendships](#)
- [Online and media](#)
- [Intimate and sexual relationships](#)
- [Mental wellbeing](#)
- [Internet safety and harms](#)

Points to cover

- Healthy, committed relationships can contribute to people's happiness by providing love and intimacy, enjoyment of time spent together, an opportunity to share everyday experiences and significant moments in life, a sense of support in facing life's challenges.
- The internet can give us the opportunity to be friends with people all over the world, and screen time can be valuable – **during the COVID-19 pandemic in particular, it has given us the opportunity to stay in contact with families and friends.**
- There are a range of opportunities for staying in touch online, such as **socialising and building friendships** (e.g. through games, using social media), **joining community forums or interest groups** (e.g. relating to sports, hobbies, volunteering), **learning and sharing knowledge** with people across the world, and **self-expression/identity** (e.g. sharing appropriate information about ourselves)
- People often develop existing friendships or make new ones online. However, as in any relationship, we should not need continual attention and approval from others online in order to feel good about ourselves. It is important to think about how interactions with friends online make you feel, and to identify if they are problematic. This could include: not being able to disconnect, obsessing about numbers of friends, getting 'likes', experiencing conflict in offline relationships, e.g. arguing with family about time spent online, or feeling pressured to behave a certain way.
- The same expectations of behaviour apply in online contexts as in offline contexts, we should never share (including by message or video) images or information that we would not want shared further. **Once something is shared someone else has a copy that they could share** with others or repost online in the future. It is also part of our 'digital footprint' and may be seen years later.
- It is usual for relationships to go through **difficult periods** and for people to disagree about some things. Sometimes one or both people choose to end a relationship. **Nobody has the right to harass or harm someone else** because they end a relationship.
- **Everyone should feel safe with adults and children** inside and outside of their family. It is important to feel that we can trust others. Signs we can trust people include being treated with respect, being listened to, and being treated fairly. Conversations with peers and trusted adults can help you solve problems.
- It is also important to ration or limit time spent online (including mobile phones) as **too much time online can have a negative effect on wellbeing.**

Supporting lesson plans from Public Health England

- [Forming positive relationships lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#)
- [Building connections – KS3 and KS4 lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#)
- [Social media – KS3 and KS4 lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#)
- [Online stress and FOMO lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#) – Slide 5 links to a film which explores the way social media can create “FOMO” a fear of missing out, slides 7 & 8 invite students to think about the characteristics of real-life friends contrasted with online friends
- [Physical and mental wellbeing KS3 and KS4 lesson plan | PHE School Zone](#) – Slide 5 features the “five ways to wellbeing” including the first way, connect with people

Additional information and resources

- [Life & wellbeing - BBC Bitesize](#)
- [Support for young people \(annafreud.org\)](http://annafreud.org)
- [On My Mind \(annafreud.org\)](http://annafreud.org)
- [Self-care tips videos for young people - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

Concern: Sleep problems

Relevant curriculum modules

- [Health and prevention](#)

Points to cover

- Sleep is important for many different reasons, for example it helps us to remember and sort what we learn during the day; enables the body to heal and grow; and helps to regulate emotions.
- Good mental wellbeing also depends on getting the right amount of sleep every day.
- Typically, you will need between 8 and 10 hours sleep a day when you are 13 to 18 year olds need.
- Good quality sleep can be helped by:
 - having a **dark, cool, quiet and comfortable** bedroom to encourage sleep;
 - **reducing stress** (e.g. breathing exercises and relaxation techniques);
 - **avoiding or reducing caffeine**. Caffeine drunk at any time of the day can affect sleep. It is present in tea, coffee, energy drinks, cocoa, chocolate, some painkillers, green tea and some fizzy drinks.
- Screen-based activities in the evening can also affect our sleep. Controlling screen use in the evening before bedtime should be encouraged. For example;
 - turning off devices at least **2 hours before bed**;
 - leaving **devices outside the bedroom** to resist the impulse to use them and if devices are in the room;
 - **limiting screen time** (especially in the immediate hours before bedtime);
 - **dimming screens** to their lowest light settings; and
- **turning on blue light filters** on screens (e.g. set screens to night mode) - blue light can disrupt the 'darkness hormone' melatonin causing the body to miss out on a cue that it is time to fall asleep, and also makes us feel more alert.

Supporting lesson plans from Public Health England

- [Sleep – KS3 and KS4 lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#)
- [Physical and mental wellbeing KS3 and KS4 lesson plan | PHE School Zone](#) – Slide 10 asks students to create a diagram showing factors that could promote good physical and mental wellbeing, including sleep

Additional information and resources

- [Self-care tips videos for young people - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- [Home - Teen Sleep Hub](#)
- [Sleep problems \(youngminds.org.uk\)](#)

Concern: Bullying

Relevant curriculum modules

- [Respectful relationships including friendships](#)
- [Online and media](#)
- [Intimate and sexual relationships](#)
- [Internet safety and harms](#)
- [Being safe](#)

Points to cover

- Everyone needs to show the same respect to others **regardless of how different** they are to them. We should recognise that stereotypes are unfair because people do not always fit into the idea that others may have of them.
- A lot of **potential is wasted** if people base their decisions on stereotypes rather than on an individual's strengths. It shows greater integrity to **respect people's individuality** rather than having preconceptions about them. Stereotypes are damaging and unfair both when they are applied to a group that is in the majority or the minority.
- Most friendships have their ups and downs, but it is important to understand that bullying is not the same as arguing with your friends. There are different types of bullying you may encounter, such as:
 - **physical**, e.g. punching or kicking someone;
 - **verbal**, e.g. spreading rumours, using racial, sexist, or homophobic slurs;
 - **non-verbal**, e.g. intimidating someone by staring at them, blocking someone's path; or
 - **psychological**, e.g. 'gaslighting', putting someone down, humiliating them, or excluding them.
- Some people might seek to get people 'cancelled' (e.g. having them removed from their position of authority or job) simply because they disagree with them. This is also a form of bullying and is not acceptable.
- All forms of bullying, including cyberbullying, are harmful. Bullying can make someone want to **hurt themselves or hurt other people**, and can have a negative impact on **mental health and wellbeing**.
- Bullying can also affect people's education, by making them miss school, and the impact of bullying can stay with someone for a long time afterwards.
- Someone might be affected by bullying even if they appear otherwise. Unexplained changes in their behaviour might be a sign of this.
- There are ways you can become an active bystander including **diffusing** the situation if you are able to do so safely; **privately asking the victim if they're okay**, giving reassurance, solidarity and offering the hand of friendship and **reporting** the bullying.
- You can also **speak to a trusted adult**, or an organisation such as [Childline](#).

Online bullying

- The same expectations of behaviour apply in online contexts as in offline contexts. Online bullying can be **extremely hurtful and damaging**. It can be hard to escape and particularly hurtful because of the 'large audience' online.
- The following behaviours are all forms of online bullying:
 - **publishing someone's personal information or images** without their consent, e.g. deliberately trying to humiliate them by sharing their private messages;
 - **intimidating or threatening someone**, e.g. with threats of violence, or revealing private information;
 - **harassing or stalking someone**, e.g. repeatedly sending unwanted messages, either privately or publicly;
 - **vilifying or defaming someone**, e.g. posting upsetting or defamatory remarks about them online;
 - **excluding someone**, e.g. setting up closed groups or 'blocking' them; and
 - **impersonating someone**, e.g. identity theft, carrying out acts online or posting messages while pretending to be that person.
- Online bullying by a pupil at the same school can be reported to the school. Other methods for preventing and tackling bullying can include **digital reporting tools** to remove content; **blocking** certain users; **taking a break** from online platforms; and **taking evidence**, for example, screenshots.
- It is important to seek support if something you have done, seen, or experienced online is:
 - making you anxious, sleepless, or concerned for your own or someone else's safety or wellbeing;
 - encouraging you or others to form more extreme views and isolate from close friends and/or family; or
 - possibly illegal, wrong, or harmful to yourself or others.

Supporting lesson plans from Public Health England

- [Bullying and cyberbullying lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#)
- [Forming positive relationships lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#) – explores the qualities that make for good friendships
- [Online stress and FOMO lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#) – includes a link to the Young Voices *Online Bullying* video on you tube
- [Alcohol lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#) – lesson plan includes a link to the Rise Above film *Advice on pressure and role models*

Additional information and resources

- [Anti-Bullying Alliance](#)
- [Ditch the Label - Youth Charity | Mental Health, Anti-Bullying, & Relationships](#)
- [EACH](#)
- [Kidscape - advice for young people](#)
- [Bullying \(youngminds.org.uk\)](#)

Concern: Friendships (including on transitions to new education settings)

Relevant curriculum modules

- [Respectful relationships including friendships](#)
- [Mental wellbeing](#)

Points to cover

- There is a **positive link between healthy connection to others and mental wellbeing**. Healthy friendships make people feel **happy, confident, safe, and positive** about themselves. This applies to relationships **in person and online**.
- In a positive and healthy friendship both people are **kind, considerate and respectful** to each other, are **honest** with each other, **listen** to each other, respect each others **personal space, privacy and boundaries** and **accept** each other's differences.
- In a respectful relationship we should be able to **express our feelings and opinions** without being made to feel stupid, scared, or embarrassed; **listen to and genuinely value** the other person's feelings and opinions and **be able to disagree** without causing a fight or someone saying hurtful things. **Everyone is entitled** to be respected. As we live in a society, we are all obliged for **everyone's benefit** to show respect and tolerance.
- Even within the closest friendships, people appreciate and expect to:
 - have their **privacy respected**, e.g. trust that their friends will not access their phone without permission;
 - have their **boundaries respected**, e.g. how closely they interact with people, physically or otherwise; and
 - be **able to choose when to give and withdraw consent**, e.g. change their mind.
- This applies to all relationships, e.g. family, friends or other's they regularly interact with.
- When there is conflict in relationships it can help to **apologise** if they are in the wrong; **discuss** ways to de-escalate conflict; **listen and acknowledge** each other's viewpoints; **clarify views and opinions** and **accept the consequences** of their actions. A **successfully resolved** conflict can **strengthen** a relationship as the parties understand more about the other person and themselves as a result.
- Friendships can end for different reasons, they can **end suddenly**, e.g. with a disagreement or people can **grow apart gradually** as they develop different interests or priorities. All people make and end relationships throughout their lives. After a relationship ends learning to move on without ill-feeling is part of a **mature response** to these normal life events, trying to maintain a relationship with someone who does not want to can be **damaging for both people**.

- Sometimes it can be difficult, but there are lots of different ways to make new friends, and to build our friendships. There are also lots of different places you can make friends, for example joining clubs where you can make friends with people who have similar interests or hobbies. It is important to recognise that we shouldn't let unfair stereotypes stop us from making friends with people who we think are different to us.
- Different types of connection (e.g. offline and online, or with family, carers or pets) should be valued. You should value quality of friendship rather than worrying about the number of friends you have.

Supporting lesson plans from Public Health England

- [Dealing with change lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#) explores expected and unexpected changes students might come across (eg exams, friendships, puberty) and the different ways of managing change
- [The worry tree – KS3 and KS4 activities | PHE School Zone](#) - includes the worry tree, a tool to support young people to combat worries

Additional information and resources

- [Self-care tips videos for young people - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)
- [Life & wellbeing - BBC Bitesize](#)

Concern: Staying safe online

Relevant curriculum modules

- [Respectful relationships including friendships](#)
- [Online and media](#)
- [Internet safety and harms](#)
- [Being safe](#)

Points to cover

- Healthy friendships make people feel happy, confident, safe, and positive about themselves. This should be the same for both online and in person relationships. If you are in a relationship that does not make you feel this way, including if you are being bullied online, you should speak to a trusted adult. [See separate page on online bullying]
- As digital citizens, we all have rights and responsibilities, similar to those we have offline, including the right to privacy and security. Violating someone's right to privacy and security is a serious offence and can be criminal.
- It is everyone's responsibility to make sure we have a safe and fair digital environment for all. The responsibilities of digital citizens include:
 - **being respectful of others** - consciously considering their needs, rights, and wishes
 - **being respectful of ourselves** - valuing ourselves and maintaining our boundaries
- The same expectations of behaviour apply in online contexts as in offline contexts. It is important to understand that our online activity leaves a 'digital footprint' (a **record of our online activities**), for example the websites we have visited and our social media activity. This footprint leaves a trace that can be seen by other people, like future employers, scammers and potential friends. It can also be used by companies to try to influence our behaviour, through targeted adverts.
- Whilst the internet provides many positive opportunities, there are some risks associated with being online. This includes:
 - people pretending to be someone they are not
 - malicious software (such as viruses) being installed on our devices
 - being exposed to misinformation
 - being treated in a harmful or abusive way
 - having private material shared widely
- We should never share (including by message or video) images or information that we would not want shared further. **Once something is shared, someone else has a copy that they could share** with others or repost online in the future. This could include material that we share publicly online (e.g. by social media posts) as well as material that we share privately (e.g. by text or email). If you are concerned about something shared online, you should talk to a trusted adult to get support and advice.

- There are also risks of interacting with people online who we do not know in our offline life, and it can be dangerous to meet people in person that we have only met online.
- You should avoid sharing personal information or anything that could compromise you (e.g. risk of blackmail over sexual images) with ‘strangers’. You should also avoid joining online groups that promote extreme views or misinformation.
- Different types of content such as pornography and extreme violence online can be damaging in many ways, such as influencing attitudes about what is acceptable or causing people to behave in unacceptable ways towards others. Some forms of sexually explicit material are illegal to view, and you can report such material to the police.
- There are strategies you can use to manage some issues online. These include **using privacy settings** to restrict who views data; **blocking’ individuals**; **using safety settings** to block harmful content; or **limiting time online** or only going online at certain times.
- Whilst there are steps we can take to reduce the risks of online harms, it is important to recognise that **it is never a child or young person’s fault** if they are harassed or targeted online. You should always **seek support** if you need to, and it is **never too late or too early** to get support.
- There are a range of support options for seeking support, such as calling 999 or contacting [Childline](#) anonymously on 0800 1111 or by email to get support. For advice and reassurance you can also talk to a trusted adult.
- Our wellbeing can also be affected by spending too much time online. For example, comparing ourselves too much with others online can have a negative effect on mental wellbeing (e.g. self esteem, body image).
- It is important to understand that whilst we might perceive others to have a perfect life (e.g. wealth, success, friends), what we see is often only the part of someone’s life they choose to share, and may not reflect the reality which could be quite different. It can also be normal to feel jealous or excluded (e.g. fear of missing out) at times, and this can affect our mental wellbeing.
- You should scrutinise the purpose of content you see online, and think about the motivations of people’s behaviour online. You should also consider whether content is trying to influence your behaviour – for example encouraging you to spend money.
- We should not need continual attention and approval from others online in order to feel good about ourselves. It is important to think about how interactions with friends online make you feel, and to identify if they are becoming problematic.
- If something you have done, seen, or experienced online is making you anxious, sleepless, or concerned for you own or someone else’s safety or wellbeing, you should seek support. This could include speaking to a trusted adult.

Supporting lesson plans from Public Health England

- [Bullying and cyberbullying lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#)
- [Online stress and FOMO lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#)

- [Social media – KS3 and KS4 lesson plan pack | PHE School Zone](#) – slide 11 asks students to think about some of the potential benefits and challenges of using social media

Additional information and resources

- [Self-care tips videos for young people - Every Mind Matters - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](#)



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for Education

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