



Education &
Early Years

Official Response to the Consultation on the Review of the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance

July 2024

Introduction / Overview of this Consultation

This consultation seeks feedback on proposed revisions to the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance 2019.

This review is an opportunity to ensure that the guidance:

- covers all essential curriculum content;
- supports high quality teaching which is inclusive and meets the needs of pupils;
- supports schools to develop an open and positive relationship with parents, complementing the role of parents as the primary educators of their children.

Rationale and guiding principles

The revised guidance has been informed by insights from a range of stakeholders, including an independent expert panel appointed by the Secretary of State to advise on what it is appropriate to teach in relationships and sex education and health education, and at what age, to ensure all content is factual and age appropriate. Over 50 organisations, including teaching unions, faith groups, parent groups, academics and RSHE providers, have contributed their expertise to this review and we have drawn on findings from our national evaluation of RSHE teaching in schools, which will be published in 2024.

Our guiding principles in carrying out this review remain the same as for the 2019 guidance:

- The role of parents in the development of their children's understanding about these subjects is vital. Parents are the first teachers of their children.
- All of the subject content must be age and developmentally appropriate.
- RSHE must be taught sensitively and inclusively, with respect for the backgrounds and beliefs of pupils and parents.
- Schools must have flexibility to shape their curriculum according to the needs of their pupils and communities.
- RSHE should prepare young people for the complexities of the world they are growing up in, and give them the tools to stay happy, safe, and healthy, and to act respectfully towards others and keep others safe.

Please read the draft guidance before completing the questions below.

You do not have to answer all questions.

Official Response on behalf of **Community Union**

About **Community Union**

Formerly PAT/PANN and latterly Voice, the Education and Early Years section of **Community Union** represent thousands of serving teachers and support staff, headteachers, lecturers, nursery and early years workers, nannies and other education professionals in schools and academies, nurseries and early years settings, colleges, and universities across the whole of the UK.

We provide legal and casework support to our members and regularly engage with them in determining our response to policy proposals.

Community Union is affiliated to the Trades Union Congress (TUC), to the Irish TUC, Scottish TUC and Welsh TUC as well as the General Federation of Trades Union (GFTU).

This Official Response has been prepared on behalf of members of the Education and Early Years section of **Community Union** by:

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This is a public document which will be published on our website following the consultation close.

The information shared within this response may be used and quoted as appropriate for the purposes it was gathered, and **Community Union** should be acknowledged as a contributor. We would be happy to discuss the comments in this response with the DfE or a research body acting on its behalf using the contact details supplied.

Review timetable

Previous guidance included a commitment to review the content of the RSHE statutory guidance every three years. There is a risk that a rigid timetable could undermine stability for teachers, but we are still committed to monitoring the curriculum to ensure it remains fit for purpose. We have, therefore, revised the commitment to “This guidance will be kept under review?”

11. Do you agree that we move away from a rigid commitment to review the guidance every three years?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

Structure of the guidance

We have heard feedback that many teachers find the guidance is too long and confusing. We have restructured the guidance to simplify the content and remove repetition.

12. Do you agree that the changes to length and style of the guide make the guidance easier to understand and follow?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

Schools' relationships and sex education policies

All primary schools are required to have a policy for relationships education, and secondary schools are required to have a policy for relationships and sex education. We have made some changes to the guidance on schools' policies for relationships and sex education, including asking schools:

- to differentiate between relationships and sex education (if they teach sex education) so that parents are clear about the content they can request withdrawal from.
- to explain how they will handle questions from pupils in relation to content that is restricted to older children, that relates to topics in primary sex education that the school doesn't cover or relates to sex education from which the pupil has been withdrawn.
- to explain how parents can view curriculum materials.

13. Do you agree that these changes will do enough to ensure that schools are transparent with parents and that parents have sufficient control regarding what their child is learning?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

14. If you would like to explain your answer, please do so here.

Whilst the structure and presentation of the guidance is logical and helpful there remain some aspects which are unclear. Community would like to see the inclusion of more detail around 'flexibilities' with some exemplars of how they might be employed to give schools the necessary confidence to use the flexibilities contained within the guidance.

Without this detail Community have concerns that schools may be open to external influence and lobbying by extremist views or excessive complaints from parents. Whilst it is reasonable for schools to determine sex education and relationship policies that meet the needs of their pupils and reflect their local community, we fear that doing so without any support or guidance could leave them open to litigation.

Openness with parents

Parents are the first teachers of their children. It is vital that they know what their children are being taught and are reassured that the resources used are factual and appropriate. The Secretary of State has already written to schools setting out her expectations about how schools share RSHE materials with parents and the revised guidance is clear that:

- There is a strong public interest in parents being able to see all materials used to teach RSHE, if they would like to, and schools should not agree to contractual restrictions which prevent this.
- Contractual clauses which seek to prevent schools sharing resources with parents at all are void, given the public interest in parents being able to see all RSHE material.
- Schools should comply with any applicable copyright law when sharing materials with parents, and this may be through a parent portal or a presentation, but might include parents being given copies of material to take home.

15. Do you agree with our proposed approach to increased transparency on RSHE material?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

16. If you would like to offer any comments to explain your answer, please do so here.

It may be true that “parents are the first teachers of their children”, but sadly, in some cases, they are not good teachers: they reinforce misinformation, stereotypes and prejudice, and in the worst cases they place their own children at risk.

It is questionable that there is a broad public interest in what is taught in schools. The suggestion that relationships and sex education might fall within the public interest is a political interpretation due to influence from a small minority of people. Even where there is genuine public interest does not mean that any one individual, group or organisation can or should have any influence over the curriculum delivered within a school setting provided it meets the requirements of the curriculum, espouses all of the British Values and supports a broad and balanced understanding.

We agree that, wherever possible, parents and carers should play an active role in the education of their children both before and also during schooling.

Therefore, although it is reasonable that schools inform parents and carers of the curriculum and areas of study it does not give them the right to argue nor decry that curriculum just because it differs from their chosen worldview.

It is crucial for schools to have governing bodies that are representative of their local area so that diverse voices can be heard in an appropriate formal manner, this also ensures that schools are accountable to their community and local area. This is the correct and appropriate forum for curriculum discussions to be had. It is not reasonable for schools to be targeted or picketed by campaign groups or other organisations which may put pupils and staff at risk.

Age limits on teaching certain subjects

The age limits were developed taking into account the advice from the independent panel, and seek to ensure that, as content is presented to prepare young people to stay safe and keep others safe, children are not introduced too early to concepts that they may not have the maturity to grasp, or which may be distressing. Age limits are focused on topics which, even when presented in a careful and well-intentioned way, may inadvertently give the message to young people that they could or should be engaging in or exploring adult activities rather than enjoying childhood.

The panel focused on five areas where they felt pupils, parents and teachers would most benefit from additional clarity: the changing adolescent body, sexual harassment and sexual violence, sexual relationships and sexual health, pornography and sexual orientation. The panel considered a range of evidence to inform their advice, including conversations with parents and faith groups.

The independent panel made a series of helpful recommendations, which have been central to our considerations. As well as making recommendations on age limits, the panel recommended that schools take a mastery approach to teaching topics within RSHE, building knowledge sequentially, and offered some advice on how topics might be sequenced. For example, if you consider the topic of being safe, children start to learn about privacy and boundaries in primary school, and build on this throughout their education, but they are not taught about the explicit details of sexual violence until they are much older.

The tables in the guidance reflect this approach.

The age limits we are consulting on are summarised below for reference, but you have the opportunity to comment on them under each relevant topic in this document. They are also marked clearly in the curriculum tables in the draft guidance.

Primary:

Topic	Age limit
The risks relating to online gaming, video game monetisation, scams, fraud and other financial harms, and that gaming can become addictive. Why social media, some apps, computer games and online gaming, including gambling sites, are age restricted.	Not before year 3
Growth, change and the changing adolescent body. This topic should include the human lifecycle. Puberty should be mentioned as a stage in this process, including the key facts about the menstrual cycle, including physical and emotional changes.	Not before year 4
Sex education topics taught in primary, which should be in line with what pupils learn about conception and birth as part of the national curriculum for science.	Not before year 5

Secondary:

Topic	Age limit
<p>What constitutes harmful sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment and the concepts and laws relating to it, including revenge porn, upskirting and taking intimate sexual photos without consent, public sexual harassment, and unsolicited sexual language / attention / touching.</p> <p>The concepts and laws relating to sexual exploitation and abuse, grooming, stalking, and forced marriage.</p> <p>Circulating images and information and how to safely report to trusted adults the non-consensual creation or distribution of an intimate image.</p> <p>The risks of inappropriate online content, including pornographic content, without discussing the details of sexual acts.</p>	Not before year 7
Direct references to suicide (as part of teaching about health and wellbeing).	Not before year 8
<p>Discussing the details of sexually explicit materials, in the context of learning about the risks of inappropriate online content, including pornographic content.</p> <p>Discussing the explicit details of violent abuse, including the detail of topics such as rape, sexual assault, female genital mutilation (FGM), virginity testing and hymenoplasty</p> <p>Discussing the explicit details of violent abuse when discussing the concepts and laws relating to domestic abuse including coercive control, emotional, sexual, economic or physical abuse, and violent or threatening behaviour.</p>	Not before year 9
Explicit discussion of the details of sexual acts, in the context of teaching about intimate and sexual relationships, including in relation to contraception and STIs.	Not before year 9

Please comment on these age limits in the relevant sections below.

Flexibility for age limits

While setting out age restrictions on when sensitive topics should be taught, we have also allowed schools a degree of flexibility to allow schools to respond promptly to issues which pose an imminent safeguarding risk to their pupils. This means that in certain circumstances, schools may decide to teach age-limited topics earlier, provided it is necessary to do so in order to safeguard pupils and provided that teaching is limited to the essential facts, without going into unnecessary details. For example, if a primary school becomes aware that pupils are sharing pornographic materials, the guidance allows schools to address this appropriately with younger pupils without going into details of the sexual acts viewed.

Note this question is not about the age limits themselves.

17. Do you think this flexibility will help to ensure that pupils are adequately safeguarded?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

18. Do you think this flexibility is warranted?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

19. If you would like to explain your answer to questions 17 or 18, please do so here

Schools have always been careful to ensure that the delivery of sex education is taught at an appropriate age, and in a manner which is appropriate for the children. As we said earlier, Community is pleased that schools continue to have the ability to be flexible with their curriculum making sure that the topics meet the needs of the pupils and the communities they serve.

However, we are concerned that even though there is flexibility some schools will be reticent to use it because of threats, political or religious reasons, or because of a fear of community unrest or litigation. Similarly, there is a risk that some teachers will be prevented from / advised against delivering materials that are needed because it is before the proposed age.

Community would like to see the inclusion of more detail around 'flexibilities', perhaps with the inclusion of some exemplars of how they might be employed to give schools the necessary confidence to use the flexibilities contained within the guidance.

In particular we would like to see greater flexibility around the teaching of FGM and for the curriculum to be able to be reflective of issues within the local area and community.

For this reason we believe that it is crucial for schools to have governing bodies that are representative of their local area so that diverse voices can be heard in an appropriate formal manner, this also ensures that schools are accountable to their community and local area since this is the correct and appropriate forum for curriculum discussions to be had. It is not reasonable for schools to be targeted or picketed by campaign groups or other organisations which may put pupils and staff at risk.

Sexual orientation

We have streamlined the section on teaching Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender topics, so that relevant content is in one place. This includes additional content on gender reassignment and gender identity, which is discussed in the section below. We have also clarified that primary schools have discretion over whether to discuss sexual orientation or families with same-sex parents.

20. Do you agree with changes to the lesbian, gay and bisexual content in the LGBT section?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

21. If you have any comments to explain your answer, please do so here.

Community is broadly content with the streamlined section on teaching Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender topics. We are especially pleased to see that Primary schools have discretion over whether to discuss sexual orientation or families with same-sex parents because this is an increasingly important topic and one which must be normalised in order to challenge bullying and inequality.

However, we are somewhat concerned that the guidance uses the phrase “Pupils should be taught the facts and the law about sex, sexual orientation and sexual health.” There have been some high-profile differences of opinion about the facts of sexual orientation, and the matter has been worryingly politicised in recent months. It may be that this paragraph needs to be reworded.

Gender reassignment

The new guidance states that pupils should know the world around them, and understand the law on equality and the protected characteristics, including gender reassignment. However, the guidance is clear that schools should not teach pupils about the contested concept of gender identity. Along with other factors, discussing such theories with pupils could prompt some pupils to start to question their gender. The new content is informed by the outcome of the Cass Review and the principles that underpin the draft guidance for schools and colleges on gender questioning pupils (gender questioning guidance), both of which advocate for a cautious approach. We consulted on the draft gender questioning guidance separately, from 19 December to 12 March, and are currently considering the outcomes, so the content of that guidance is not within the scope of this consultation.

The new guidance states that:

- Schools should teach about the protected characteristics, including gender reassignment.
- Schools should be clear that an individual must be over 18 before they can legally reassign their gender. This means that a child's legal sex will always be the same as their biological sex and that, at school, boys cannot be legally classified as girls or vice versa.
- Schools should not teach about the concept of "gender identity" which is a highly contested and complex concept.
- If asked about the topic of gender identity, schools should teach the facts about biological sex and not use any materials that present contested views as fact, including the view that gender is a spectrum.
- Schools should not use materials that use cartoons or diagrams that oversimplify this complex concept or that could be interpreted as aimed at younger children.
- Schools should consult parents on the content of external resources on this topic in advance and make all materials available to them on request.

22. Do you agree with the proposed changes related to gender identity and gender reassignment in the guidance?

☐ Yes

☒ No

23. If you have any comments to explain your answer, please do so here:

More than ever, children and young people are aware of the world around them. They have strong views and opinions on issues such as climate change and mental health and wellbeing which profoundly differ with their parents and those in positions of authority.

We cannot accept the statement that schools should not discuss gender reassignment because “discussing such theories with pupils could prompt some pupils to start to question their gender”. Such assertions are absurd. As we noted in our Official Response to the Consultation on Gender Questioning Children, this guidance assumes a ‘ground zero’ which is not the experience of many in our schools.

Again, there is confusion in the guidance about what schools can and cannot do. For example it states that “schools should not teach pupils about the contested concept of gender identity”, but it then advises schools to say that “an individual must be over 18 before they can legally reassign their gender.”

We agree that the use of patronising or overly simplistic cartoon resources should not be used, but we do not agree that schools should consult with their parent body about the curriculum. As previously mentioned, whilst it is reasonable for schools to inform parents and carers of the curriculum, this does not give parents the right to argue nor criticise that curriculum just because it differs from their chosen worldview.

It is crucial for schools to have governing bodies so that diverse voices – including those of parents, can be heard in an appropriate formal manner, this also ensures that schools are accountable to their community and local area. This is the correct and appropriate forum for curriculum discussions to be had.

Sadly, what this section does is to dismiss the concerns and opinions of students, driving them to seek information from other sources such as the internet, rather than being able to have an academic discussion with a trained teacher; and it fails to support the teachers, staff and schools should issues arise.

Addressing prejudice, harassment and sexual violence

We have included a new section in the guidance specifically on addressing prejudice, harassment and sexual violence and harmful sexual behaviours, in light of evidence of the prevalence of sexual harassment in some schools. The section includes new content on addressing the harmful behaviours that pupils may be exposed to, including online, which may normalise harmful or violent sexual behaviours - for example, by giving pupils the opportunity to identify positive male role models. This new section also highlights the role of staff in avoiding language that might perpetuate harmful stereotypes or suggest that victims are to blame for abusive behaviour.

We have also included new content relating to sexual harassment and sexual violence in the curriculum, including by adding fixated and obsessive behaviours, such as stalking, to the secondary Respectful Relationships topic, and offering clearer guidance on teaching about image-based sexual abuse in the secondary Online and Media topic.

The secondary Being Safe topic has been strengthened to include more of the detail on communicating and recognising consent, to be clear that this is a key plank in pupils' learning to keep others safe. The Being Safe topic also now lists specific forms of sexual harassment that may otherwise be neglected, including revenge porn, upskirting, public sexual harassment, and unsolicited sexual language / attention / touching.

24. Do you agree that the revised content on addressing prejudice, harassment and sexual violence is a helpful response to evidence of the prevalence of sexual abuse in schools?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

25. If you would like to explain your answer, please do so here.

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Primary sex education

The new guidance is clear that where primary schools choose to teach sex education, its purpose is not to prepare pupils for sexual activity in later life, but to focus on giving pupils the information they need to understand human reproduction and for their own safety. Primary schools should take account of the age restrictions in the secondary RSHE curriculum tables.

The new guidance continues to recommend that primary schools have a sex education programme, but restricts this to no earlier than years 5 or 6, and is clear that if a primary school teaches sex education, it should draw on the knowledge pupils are developing about the human life cycle, as set out in the national curriculum for science.

26. Do you agree with the restriction on teaching sex education only in years 5 or 6?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

27. If you would like to make any comments to explain your answer, please do so here. It would be helpful if you could share your own views on appropriate age limits for this topic, for example if you think they are too low or too high.

Community understands and agrees that the purpose of sex education, whether taught at primary school is education and is clearly not to prepare pupils for sexual activity in later life, however we do have concerns that the hard-and-fast ages as set in the guidance might not be appropriate for all pupils in all schools all of the time. Indeed this consultation itself notes that there will be a need to flexible and to address issues such as pornography (mentioned in the questions relating to flexibility for age limits) as and when they arise.

As previously mentioned, we are pleased with the flexibilities that are proposed which should allow schools to address issues as an when they arise, but we reiterate our concerns that any flexibilities must be made clear so that teachers, support staff and the schools themselves are not vulnerable to criticism or worse.

Secondary topics: Online and Media, Respectful Relationships, including friendships, and Being Safe

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Respectful Relationships, including Friendships topic: What constitutes harmful sexual behaviour and why, and that such behaviour is unacceptable, emphasising that it is never the fault of the person experiencing it.

This should not be taught before year 7.

28. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Respectful Relationships, including Friendships topic: That some types of behaviour, including within relationships, are criminal, including violent behaviour and emotional abuse, such as controlling or coercive behaviour.

Schools should not, however, teach about the details of violent abuse before Y9 as it is important that pupils are not introduced to distressing concepts when they are too young to understand them.

29. Do you agree with this age limit?

☐ Yes
☒ **No**

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Online and Media topic: About circulating images and information and how to safely report to trusted adults the non-consensual creation or distribution of an intimate image. Pupils should understand that making, keeping or sending naked or sexual images of someone under 18 is a crime, even if the photo is of themselves or of someone who has consented, and even if the image was created by the child and/or using AI generated imagery. Pupils should understand the potentially serious consequences of asking for naked, semi-naked or sexual images, including the potential for criminal charges and severe penalties including imprisonment.

This topic should not be taught before year 7.

30. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Online and Media topic: The impact of viewing harmful content, including pornography, that presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others, and can negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners. This can affect pupils who see pornographic content accidentally as well as those who see it deliberately.

The risks of inappropriate online content can be discussed in an age-appropriate way from year 7, however, the details of sexual acts should not be discussed before year 9.

31. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The concepts and laws relating to harmful sexual behaviour, including sexual harassment, revenge porn, upskirting and taking/sharing intimate sexual photographs without consent, public sexual harassment, and unsolicited sexual language / attention / touching.

This should not be taught before year 7.

32. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The concepts and laws relating to sexual exploitation, grooming, stalking, and forced marriage.

This should not be taught before year 7.

33. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**
☐ No

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic:
The concept and laws relating to sexual violence, including rape and sexual assault.

Whilst it's important for pupils to understand the key principles around sexual offences and violence, for example the importance of understanding what consent means, schools should not teach about this in any sexually explicit way before year 9.

34. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic:
The physical and emotional damage which can be caused by female genital mutilation (FGM), virginity testing and hymenoplasty, where to find support, and the law around these areas. This should include that it is a criminal offence to perform or assist in the performance of FGM, virginity testing or hymenoplasty, or fail to protect a person under 16 for whom someone is responsible from FGM, or to take girls who are UK nationals abroad for FGM, regardless of whether it is lawful in that country.

This should not be taught before year 9, except for where schools have identified a greater risk of FGM at an earlier age or have pupils who have been affected by FGM and need support.

35. Do you agree with this age limit?

☐ Yes

☒ **No**

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the secondary Being Safe topic: The concepts and laws relating to domestic abuse including controlling or coercive behaviour, emotional, sexual, economic or physical abuse, and violent or threatening behaviour¹.

Schools should not teach about the details of violent abuse before year 9 as it is important that pupils are not introduced to distressing concepts when they are too young to understand them.

36. Do you agree with this age limit?

☐ Yes

☒ **No**

37. If you would like to offer any comments about the age restrictions in the secondary Online and Media, Respectful Relationships, including Friendships, and Being Safe topics please do so here. It would be helpful if you could share your own views on appropriate age limits for these topics, for example if you think they are too low or too high.

Please try to limit your response to under 250 words.

Please do not add any details which may easily identify you or your organisation.

Several Community members work with pupils in schools that cater for children and young adults with special educational needs and have experienced firsthand some of the difficulties that the pupils and their families experience. In particular, pupils who are limited by their understanding or speech and may be at greater risk of abuse due to their inability to share their concerns.

In that same way, we would recommend that schools be free to address abuse, sensitively and appropriately, if it is happening or believed to be happening in the school. This might need to cover a broad range of abuse including sexual and violent abuse as well as other forms before Y9, though we appreciate this might not need to be commonly taught and it must always be within age-appropriate discussions.

The more that children are exposed to adult themes through the News, media, TV and social media the more that they are at risk and the more that it can adversely affect children's lives.

¹ The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021](#) recognised children who see, hear, or experience the effects of abuse, and are related to either the victim of the abusive behaviour, or the perpetrator, as victims of domestic abuse in their own right (part 1 section 3). The [Domestic Abuse Act 2021 statutory](#) guidance is designed to support statutory and non-statutory bodies working with victims of domestic abuse, including children.

Secondary topic: Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

This topic includes information about choices around sex, including about when and whether to have sex, about sexual consent, reproductive health, strategies for resisting sexual pressure, facts about contraception, facts about pregnancy and choices around pregnancy, facts about STIs and reducing risks of transmission, facts about the impact of alcohol and drugs on sexual behaviour, and information about where to get help.

Explicit discussion of the details of sexual acts should only take place in so far as it is necessary to teach these topics and should not be taught before year 9

38. Do you agree with the age restriction on the secondary Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health topic?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

39. If you would like to offer any comments about this age restriction, please do so here. It would be helpful if you could share your own views on appropriate age limits for these topics, for example if you think they are too low or too high.

Community agrees that broadly speaking it is appropriate to continue to restrict the teaching of intimate and sexual relationships as typically happens at present.

Health and wellbeing

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the primary Online Safety and Harms topic within health education: why social media, some apps, computer games and online gaming, including gambling sites, are age restricted.

This should not be taught before year 3.

40. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

We have placed an age limit on the following content in the primary Online Safety and Harms topic within health education: the risks relating to online gaming, video game monetisation, scams, fraud and other financial harms, and that gaming can become addictive.

This should not be taught before year 3.

41. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

We have placed an age restriction on the whole of the primary Developing Bodies topic within health education.

This should not be taught before year 4.

This covers:

- growth, change and the changing adolescent body, this topic should include the human lifecycle. Puberty should be mentioned as a stage in this process.
- the key facts about the menstrual cycle, including physical and emotional changes.

42. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

The secondary Health and Wellbeing topic is now clear that, given the sensitivity and complexity of content on suicide prevention, direct references to suicide should not be made before year 8.

43. Do you agree with this age limit?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

44. If you would like to offer any comments about these age restrictions, please do so here. It would be helpful if you could share your own views on appropriate age limits for these topics, for example if you think they are too low or too high.

Community agrees that broadly speaking it is appropriate to continue to deliver health and wellbeing lessons to children in the years identified above, as typically happens at present.

Health and Wellbeing

We have renamed Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing in the guidance, which now appears as Health and Wellbeing. We have also renamed the primary Mental Wellbeing topic, which now appears as General Wellbeing. We have also added a learning outcome in the primary General Wellbeing topic and the secondary Mental Wellbeing topic, that pupils should understand that worrying and feeling down are normal and affect everyone at different times and are not in themselves a sign of a mental health condition.

45. Do you agree with changes to the Health and Wellbeing section of the guidance?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

46. If you would like to offer any comments to explain your answer, please do so here.

Community appreciates that by merging mental and physical health and wellbeing together it removes any division that may inadvertently be seen. We feel that this is a good thing as it unites wellbeing and potential removes the prejudice that sometimes surrounds mental health.

However, by renaming the primary *Mental Wellbeing* topic it could be seen as minimising the issues which are increasingly being faced by children, schools and parents and which fails to be addressed due to a significant lack of capacity in children's mental health teams and in the NHS.

Suicide prevention

The 2019 guidance includes many topics relevant to the prevention of suicide. While it does not ask schools to address suicide prevention directly in health education, it says that schools should be aware that children may raise topics including self-harm and suicide and advises teachers to be aware of the risks of encouraging or making suicide seem a more viable option for pupils and avoid material being instructive rather than preventative.

Whilst the suicide rate in under 20s is relatively low compared to older age groups, rates across all age groups under 25 have been increasing over the last decade in England. This includes rates in 10–14-year-olds [Suicide prevention strategy for England: 2023 to 2028](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028) - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk).

During a Westminster Hall debate on suicide prevention in March 2023, the Minister for Schools agreed to include the area as part of the review of the RSHE statutory guidance. The Department has held a workshop with teachers and two roundtables – one with experts and the voluntary and community sector, and the other with bereaved families - to listen to their opinions and experiences. There was agreement across the groups that suicide prevention should be discussed explicitly at the appropriate age.

The guidance now addresses suicide more explicitly (paragraphs 83-86), explaining that in teaching about mental health and wellbeing within the RSHE curriculum, schools may wish to talk to young people about the prevention of suicide, including how to identify warning signs and where and how to seek help.

The guidance says that if addressing suicide directly, teaching should focus on equipping pupils to recognise when they, or someone they know, needs support and where they can seek help if they have concerns. This should include details on which adults in school (e.g. school nurses), and externally can help. Teachers should use language and content that is accurate, straightforward and appropriate to the level of understanding of the class. They should take particular care to avoid discussing instructions or methods of self-harm or suicide and avoid using emotive language, videos or images. Given the sensitivity and complexity of content on suicide prevention, direct references to suicide should not be made before Year 8.

47. Do you agree with the proposals on suicide prevention as set out above?

☒ **Yes**

☐ No

48. If you would like to offer any comments to explain your answer, please do so here

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Additional topics

There are a number of additional areas that we propose adding to the statutory guidance following submissions from other government departments, stakeholders and experts. These include:

- Loneliness
- New content on gambling
- Prevalence of 'deepfakes'
- Antimicrobial resistance
- Healthy behaviours during pregnancy
- Illegal online behaviours including drug and knife supply
- Personal safety, including road, railway and water safety
- Vaping,
- Menstrual and gynaecological health including endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), heavy menstrual bleeding
- Parenting and early years brain development
- Virginity testing and hymenoplasty
- Bereavement

49. Do you agree with this additional content?

☒ **Yes**

☒ **No**

50. If you have any comments to explain your answer, please do so here

This list of additional topics is very diverse, so it is an impossible to give a simple one-word answer.

Certainly, these topics and others may all have a valid reason to be included in the curriculum, and there are others which may need to be considered for inclusion. However, there is not the capacity within the RSE curriculum to add so much additional content, but that is a different discussion.

General comments

51. Is there anything else in the draft statutory guidance that you would like to comment on?

Public Sector Equality Duty [PSED]

- 52. Do you have any comments regarding the potential impact of the guidance on those who share a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010, whether negative or positive? How could any adverse impact be reduced and are there any other ways we could advance equality of opportunity or foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not?**

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