

What should you do?

TALK:

- To your children. Ask them about lessons at school. Say what your views and values on sex and relationships are. Answer their questions.
- To your school, especially if you have concerns. Initially talk to your child's tutor or class teacher. They might well suggest you discuss the matter with the head teacher, or senior teacher, if concerns remain.
- To other parents, especially from your community and those with similar beliefs to yourself.

LISTEN:

- To your children, their questions and wishes.
- To your child's teacher and / or head teacher. Clearly understand the school's values, policy and approach to SRE.
- To the opinions of other parents and how they manage this with their children.

Some useful values statements to think about when talking with your child:

- Have sex with someone you really care about and who will share responsibility for contraception and safer sex.
- It would be better to wait to have sex until you are old enough to take responsibility.
- Families have different beliefs about sex, sometimes these are guided by the religion that they follow.
- Sex should never be used to exploit someone.

You may choose to approach a range of organisations that exist to offer advice and support regarding sex and relationships. A list can be obtained from the Sex Education Forum at:

National Children's Bureau
8 Wakely Street
London EC1V 7QE
Tel: 020 7843 6000
E-mail: sexedforum@ncb.org.uk

For more copies of this leaflet please call DfES publications on 0845 602 2260 quoting reference code **DfES 0706/2001**

Who is this leaflet for?

It is written for parents and carers. Particularly those who may have worries about sex and relationship education (SRE) at school and those who want to find out more.

What is sex and relationship education (SRE)?

It is lifelong learning about physical, moral and emotional development. It is about understanding the importance of marriage for family life; stable and loving relationships, respect, love and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality and sexual health. It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity.

Why does sex and relationship education (SRE) matter?

Our children learn about sex and relationships from the very youngest age, even if we don't talk with them. Some of the things they learn are incorrect, confusing and frightening. In a world where sex is used to sell things from food to fast cars, and celebrities' lives become everyone's business, we should talk to our children to help them make sense of it all.

As well as this, in the UK we have the highest rates of teenage pregnancy in Western Europe. We also have high rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Effective SRE does not encourage early sexual experimentation - but it does enable young people to mature, to build up their confidence and self-esteem and to understand the reasons for delaying sexual activity until they are ready.

Parents and sex and relationship education (SRE):

As a parent / carer, you are the key person for your child's learning about sex and relationships. Schools should always work in partnership with parents / carers. You need to know that the school's SRE programme will complement your role and support you as sex educator of your child. For example, governing bodies and schools should consult with parents / carers when developing or updating the school's SRE policy. They should ensure your views are heard and that taught SRE is culturally appropriate and inclusive of all children.

The content of school sex and relationship education:

National guidance from the DfES (Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, published in July 2000) advises schools on the themes that should be covered. SRE should support young people through their physical, emotional and moral development.

Formal SRE will be taught through compulsory science lessons (see table) and during other, specific lessons, often called PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education). Informally, your child will learn about SRE through the values and ethos of the school and through contact with other children.

National Curriculum Science.

Key Stage 1

- Animals, including humans, move, feed, grow, use their sense and reproduce
- Children should recognise and name the main external parts of the human body.
- That humans can produce offspring and these grow into adults
- Children should recognise similarities and differences between themselves and other and treat others with sensitivity.

Key Stage 3

- Fertilization in humans is the fusion of a male and female cell
- Students should know the physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence
- The human reproductive cycle, including the menstrual cycle and fertilisation
- How the growth and reproduction of bacteria and the replication of viruses can affect human health.

Key Stage 2

- Life processes common to humans include nutrition, growth and reproduction
- The main stages of the human lifecycle.

Key Stage 4

- Hormonal control in humans, including the effects of sex hormones
- Medical uses of hormones, including the control and promotion of fertility
- How sex is determined in humans.

What young people say:

- They want to learn about sex and relationships from their parents / carers.
- They want more than just the biological facts. They want to talk about feelings and morals.
- They want adults to answer their questions.
- Just over half found it easy to talk to a parent about sex.*

What do other parents say:

- They have anxieties about sex and relationships and their children.
- 84% say there would be fewer teenage pregnancies if more parents talked to their children about sex.*
- 87% feel too many teenagers are pressurised into having sex.*
- Many find TV programmes or a book a helpful way to raise the subject.*
- One in three mums and two in three dads have not told their children 'a lot or anything' about sex and relationships.*

**Source: research by BRMB on behalf of the Department of Health. December 2000*

Young people who have good sex and relationship education at home and at school, start sex later and are less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy or to get a sexually transmitted infection.

Your rights as a parent.

You should be consulted by your child's school about its SRE policy and informed about what is taught in the SRE lesson. Parents/carers have the right to withdraw their child from some, or all, SRE lessons, but not statutory science lessons. Where schools work within the SRE guidelines and consult effectively with parents/carers, you should feel re-assured about the content of the lessons.

However, should you be considering such a step, talk it through with your child and then with either the head teacher or another senior teacher at the school. If you decide this step is necessary, then the school should provide information about the lessons being missed and ideas for other sources of support for you to fulfil the task of educating your child.