

SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION

Tips and resources for parents and carers of primary-aged children

Sex and relationships education (SRE) is learning about growing up, relationships, sexual health and reproduction. At primary school, this includes:

- **Physical** development, for example how our bodies change in puberty
- **Emotional** development, including how to manage feelings
- **Social** development, such as how to manage friendships and positive and negative influences from peers

SRE gives children and young people essential knowledge to help them stay safe and understand what is happening as they grow up.

Whatever topic children are learning about in SRE, teaching should always stress the values of love, respect and care for one another.

Why is SRE important in primary school?

Children will get information about sex and relationships from their peers and from sources such as television, the internet, adverts, newspapers and magazines. A lot of this is unreliable and misleading and can be frightening.

Children need to get reliable information from both their school and family about their bodies, growing up, having babies and staying safe. National and international research shows that when delivered well, SRE has a protective function. For example, children who are taught about safe and unsafe touch, are more likely to tell an adult if they experience abuse.

What can I expect from school?

It is compulsory for maintained primary schools to teach about human life cycles as part of science, and all state-funded primary schools are advised to teach about puberty before children experience it. But good SRE includes much more than just the biological basics. Each school must choose what it will teach about relationships and how to do this.

Schools must have an SRE policy and parents have the right to see the policy. This will state what the school teaches about sex and relationships (in addition to science). Academies and free schools can choose to have an SRE policy.

All (state-funded) schools must publish information on their website about what is covered in each subject of their curriculum. So if they teach SRE this information should be online, often as part of the PSHE education curriculum.



WHAT DO CHILDREN WANT TO KNOW?

AGE 3-6

- Who is in my family?
- What do my friends like about me?
- Why are girls' and boys' bodies different?
- Where do babies come from?
- Which parts of my body are private?
- Who can I go to if I am worried about something?

AGE 7-8

- How do I know when I am being bullied?
- Why are some children growing up quicker than others?
- Should boys and girls behave differently?
- What are eggs and sperm?
- How do different animals have babies?
- When is it good or bad to keep secrets?

AGE 9-11

- What is love? How do we show love to one another?
- What do the words 'lesbian' and 'gay' mean?
- What is puberty?
- Is my body normal?
- What are wet dreams?
- What are sexual feelings?
- Can I believe everything I see on TV about bodies/relationships?
- How can girls manage periods?
- Who can I talk to if I want help or advice?

For the full list of questions to help design a primary SRE curriculum see:

<http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources/curriculum-design.aspx>

What can parents do?

Children say that they want their parents to be the first to talk to them about growing up, sex and relationships. So there is a lot you can do at home. Many parents want to do this but find it embarrassing and difficult. Try using the tips and resources below to get started and have a look at the questions children ask at different ages.

Do...

- Read books, leaflets, look at a website or watch a DVD together
- Talk while you're doing something else, e.g. washing up or driving
- Enjoy talking about it. Laugh with each other, not at each other
- Listen rather than judge. Try asking what your child thinks. Make sure you understand what your child's question really is.
- Answer questions and don't be afraid to say: 'I really don't know – let's work it out or look it up together'.
- Always respond, if you don't, she or he may think it is wrong to talk to you about sex and relationships and, as a result, you may find your child clams up when you raise the subject.
- If it all feels too personal, try talking about people in books, films, and favourite television programmes such as soaps.

Don't...

- Say you will tell them when they are older. Instead, find a way to answer them that matches their level of understanding.
- Bombard your child with questions if they ask you a question. If you are concerned about a question or a comment they have made, gently try to find out why they are asking it.
- Talk too much. Children say it is awful to get a lecture on growing up. Try to make it a two-way conversation.
- Be afraid to tell your children what you think, and why. But do try and avoid making harsh judgments of others and give your child some leeway to come to their own opinions.

FOR MORE HELP AND ADVICE

Ask your child's school how they are supporting parents with SRE

Visit the Family Lives website www.familylives.org.uk

Visit this NHS website with information for parents about puberty

www.nhs.uk/Livewell/puberty/Pages/Pubertyinfoforparents.aspx

For advice on internet safety visit the CEOP 'thinkuknow' site for parents <https://www.thinkuknow.co.uk/parents/>

The Sex Education Forum is a membership organisation and works together with its members and other stakeholders to achieve quality sex and relationships education (SRE). Established in 1987, we believe that ALL children and young people have the right to good SRE. Our work on SRE is underpinned by evidence, a rights-based approach and the expressed needs of children and young people.



SUGGESTED READING FROM PARENTS

PICTURE BOOKS 3-6

Mummy Laid an Egg - Babette Cole

And Tango Makes three - Justin Richardson

The Great Big Book of Families – Hoffman & Asquith

The Feelings Book - Todd Parr

Secret, secret - Daisy Law

NON-FICTION 7-8



We read this together and would take turns with the different characters. It never felt too serious or embarrassing.

It's So Amazing - Harris & Emberley

Great answers to difficult questions about sex – Linda Goldman

NON-FICTION 9-11



My son actually read this alongside the 'for girls' book. I would often find him reading them by himself.

What's Happening to me? (Girls Edition) – Meredith & Leschnikoff

What's Happening to me? (Boys Edition) – Frith & Leschnikoff

Let's Talk About Sex – Harris & Emberley

Contact us for more suggested reading at SETraining@ncb.org.uk