

# **Parental Guidance on Relationships Education/ Relationships & Sex Education**

**How to navigate statutory RHE/RSHE  
and talk to our children about sex and  
growing up**

**A GUIDE FOR MUSLIM PARENTS**



## HOW TO ENSURE YOUR VOICE IS HEARD BY SCHOOLS

As Muslim parents we have a unique emotional and spiritual attachment to our children. We want the best for them, both in the temporary life of this world and in the hereafter. There are

many opportunities for our children to flourish but we also have to be awake to any threats to their Islamic identity and respond accordingly.

One of the concerns we have to be aware of is the way Relationships and Health Education (RHE), Sex Education (SE) and Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) are taught in schools. Of course we recognise that the world our children are growing up in is hugely different to the one we grew up in. Whilst these changes have been made by adults, it's our children who have to deal with the fall out. The proliferation of pornography, the move away from family values, the downgrading of marriage, the anything goes culture that shapes the choices of most people has an impact on us all, including our children.

We do not welcome the fact that the government has hijacked another aspect of the parental role by placing greater responsibility on schools. Despite this, we have to ensure that we minimise the damage that these changes will have on our children.

The Birmingham example shows what can happen when things go wrong. When parents feel like they are not being listened to, and there is a breakdown in trust between parents and schools, parents can take drastic actions such as protests outside of schools. We do not want this to happen elsewhere, but just as we urge parents to show restraint and work with schools, we expect schools to reciprocate in order to avert protests

outside schools.

SRE will be changing in September 2020.

Are you ready for these changes? Are you going to be a passive bystander to the changes that will affect all of our children? Or are you going to be an active participant in reminding schools why and how you should be involved.

This booklet is designed to support your engagement with schools as well as helping to support you in fulfilling your parental responsibilities to raise your children in line with our Islamic values.

# PRIMARY SCHOOLS

## WHAT ARE THE STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS?

- All primary schools have to teach Relationships and Health Education (RHE).
- Sex Education is not a statutory requirement. If a primary school decides to teach it, parents have the absolute right to withdraw.
- All primary schools must have an RHE policy. Parents must be consulted on its contents before it is finalised.
- Parents must be consulted on **how** and **when** a school intends to teach these new statutory subjects.
- There is no requirement to cover any aspect of sexual relationships, opposite gender or same-sex sexual relationships or transgender identities within RHE. Primary schools are encouraged to teach LGBT-inclusive Relationships Education, yet this is not a requirement. It becomes a requirement in secondary schools, where RSE (Relationships and Sex Education) is statutory.

**How:** Parents must be consulted on the school's choice of resources. The age and religious background of pupils must be taken into account when a school is deciding which resources to use.

**When:** Parents must be included when deciding which year groups to cover the learning outcomes.

# SECONDARY SCHOOLS

## WHAT ARE THE STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS?

- All secondary schools have to teach Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).
  - You have the right to request withdrawal from the Sex Education but not Relationships Education elements of RSHE. A school should be approve all requests, other than in exceptional situations (these are set by the Head teacher/ Governing Board).
  - You have the right to request withdrawal up to the stage your child reaches 15 (three school terms before your child turns 16). At this point the decision to withdraw is transferred to your child, who can choose to remain withdrawn or to opt in.
  - All secondary schools must have a RSHE policy. Schools must consult parent before it is finalised.
  - You must be consulted on **how** and **when** the school intends to teach these new statutory subjects to your child(ren).
- How:** You must be included when decisions on resources are made. The age and religious background of pupils must be taken into account when a school is deciding which resources to use
- When:** You must be included when deciding which year groups to cover the learning outcomes.

# WHAT DOES THE STATUTORY GUIDANCE SAY?



**Schools support parents in the area of RHE/RSHE, they do not replace the role of parents. Schools must accept that parents raise children and not schools**

We are clear that parents and carers are the prime educators for children on many of these matters. Schools complement and reinforce this role and have told us that they

see building on what pupils learn at home as an important part of delivering a good education.

(Page 4, Statutory Guidance)

Parents are the first teachers of their children. They have the most significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.

(Page 17, Statutory Guidance)

**Schools have a legal responsibility to ensure they consult parents before finalising their policy. The policy has to meet the needs of parents, pupils, as well as the community the school serves**

All schools must have in place a written policy for Relationships Education and RSE. Schools must consult parents in developing and reviewing their policy. Schools should ensure that the policy meets the needs of pupils and parents and reflects the community they serve.

(Page 11, Statutory Guidance)

**Schools should work alongside parents when planning and delivering these subjects**

All schools should work closely with parents when planning and delivering these subjects.

(Page 17, Statutory Guidance)

**Schools must show that they have factored in the age and religious background of pupils when making decisions about the resources they use**

“Schools must also ensure that their teaching and materials are appropriate having regard to the age and religious backgrounds of their pupils.”

(Page 24, Statutory Guidance)

# WHAT SHOULD MEANINGFUL CONSULTATION LOOK LIKE?

**Schools should facilitate a formal process to listen and respond to your views.**

“Consultation is a process by which an organisation, over a specific period of time, seeks the opinions of relevant people about particular activities or proposals, to better understand their views and take them into account when making final decisions. For schools, consultation is about them providing formal channels through which parents can express their views about certain aspects of the school’s work.”

(Page 2, Parental Engagement on Relationships Education, DfE)

**Schools should view consultation as a way to understand the views of parents. You should be**

**provided an opportunity to be listened to and heard.**

“Engagement is a positive step – it helps to ensure that everyone involved understands what is being taught, when and how. It helps develop a shared set of values between parents and schools on these subjects. It gives parents a voice and the knowledge that their views are being listened to. It helps to dispel myths about the subjects, and it creates an opportunity to build stronger relationships with parents.”

(Page 4, Parental Engagement on Relationships Education, DfE)

**Through the consultation process a school has to respond to any strongly held views that parents voice. That is why it is important that you express your concerns clearly.**



Engagement means schools providing the opportunity for parents to feed in their views on the school's proposed Relationships Education policy, and includes considering whether any strongly held views of their parent body should lead the school to adapt when and how they approach certain topics with their pupils.

(Page 5, Parental Engagement on Relationships Education, DfE)

### **What Can Be Changed?**

All schools have to teach these subjects but they have been given flexibility to decide how and when RHE/RSHE should be taught. They have to teach the core content but they have the flexibility to adapt elements of the content to meet the needs of their pupils and communities.

**We are determined that the subjects must be deliverable and give schools flexibility to shape their curriculum according to the needs of their pupils and communities.**

(Page 4, Statutory Guidance)

Schools have been given flexibility in the following areas:

- The government has left the choice of resources up to schools.
- There is no requirement for external organisations to deliver the curriculum requirements.
- The government has not matched the learning outcomes with year groups. The school can decide when to teach the learning outcomes.
- Schools must consult parents and take their views into account when making the final decisions about resources and year groups to cover the learning outcomes.
- Primary schools do not have to cover LGBT content.

### **Sexual Content**

You must ensure that children are not prematurely exposed to sexual content in RHE/RSHE lessons. Although Relationships Education in primary and secondary schools does not contain such content, it's important to ensure that schools do not go beyond what is required. The contents a school is planning to teach needs to be clearly set out in the RHE/RSHE policy.

## LBGT Content

If a school teaches about LGBT families in order to fulfil equality requirements, they should also acknowledge there are nine protected characteristics, one of them being faith/belief. Schools should not go beyond factual discussions, such as different people live in our society and they ought to be treated with courtesy like any other person.

This includes those whose lifestyle choices we may disagree with. Schools should not go beyond factual explanations to impose values in children that go against their deeply held religious views. An example of this would be a school telling a child ‘it’s okay to be Muslim and gay’, or ‘it’s perfectly fine for a boy to decide to be a girl or girl a boy’. Doing so would be an interference in the religious life of communities. This is not why parents send their children to schools.

### What should parents do?

- Equip yourselves with knowledge of parental rights and the flexibility schools have.
- Ensure that schools engage you in meaningful consultation. Meaningful consultation means schools must provide you an opportunity to feed back your views, welcome your

contributions with an open mind and make appropriate changes. (We recommend referring schools to the guidance documents we have created for schools

<https://www.sreislamic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SREIslamic-Primary-School-Guidance.pdf>

<https://www.sreislamic.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/SREIslamic-Secondary-School-Guidance.pdf>

- Prepare for the consultation

You should ensure that when approaching the school you do so in the spirit of collaboration and cooperation. You are investing in a relationship with the school. By taking this approach, any school which values this relationship with parents will reciprocate.

### What should parents aim to achieve through the consultation process?

Your objectives are to ensure:

- The elimination of inappropriate resources containing imagery that expose children to sexual content. This contributes to fulfilling the requirement for schools to ensure that the religious background of pupils is paid due regard.
- Learning outcomes are delayed to the appropriate age and maturity of your

children.

- Outside organisations are not brought into the school to deliver content. If a school decides to invite outside organisations, there should be a clear policy governing their remit such as what they can and cannot say.
- There has to be a clear separation between Sex Education and Relationships Education topics, so parents can easily withdraw from Sex Education classes in both primary and secondary schools.
- Head teachers in secondary schools should approve all requests for withdrawal from Sex Education classes. There are exceptional situations when a request to withdraw your child can be rejected. These should be clearly set out in the policy, including a process for parents to appeal if a school rejects your request.

# TOP TIPS TO INFLUENCE DECISION MAKING IN SCHOOLS



## **1. Approach schools in a positive manner**

The vast majority of head teachers want a good relationship with parents. They also want to follow government guidance and get parents involved in the process of defining the RHE/RSHE programme. Always approach head teachers/school staff/governing boards constructively

and positively. Be clear that you want to be involved in shaping the school's programme so that it is age appropriate and takes into account your child's religious background. As a rule we should be involved in schools as governors, and volunteers. We should thank schools when they do well by our children, as well as feeding back to schools when we have concerns.

## **2. Ask for a clear timeline for consultation**

Ask the head teacher to clarify:

- the school's timeline for implementing statutory RHE/RSHE
- how and when parents like you will be involved in the consultation process
- what the consultation process looks like and how parental views will shape the school's final decision

Suggest that the school uses a survey to get a general understanding of how and when parents want the learning outcomes covered and then conduct smaller focus groups to get a clearer idea of parental views

## **3. Be part of the consultation process**

Offer your services to the school as an interested parent who wishes to work in partnership with the school to feed into the consultation process.

## **4. Prepare before attending consultation events**

Ensure you understand what curriculum topics schools are required to teach and the areas in which they have been provided with flexibility. If the school is considering particular resources, ask to review the content to equip you

to provide clearer feedback. Read the curriculum outcomes on page **(15-21)** and go prepared with suggestions about when the learning outcomes should be covered. Ensure the primary school is aware that there is no requirement to cover LGBT relationships. Ask the school how it intends to make these decisions in consultation with parents.

## **5. Work with other parents**

It is very important that you work together with other parents who share your concerns and work together to ensure the school implements these subjects in an age-appropriate and faith sensitive way. Speak to and educate other parents, whether they are Muslim, from another faith background or no faith background. Helping schools to get the implementation of RelEd/RSE right and to include all parents in the decision-making process, should be a concern for all parents.

## **6. Be clear on what you are trying to achieve**

Parents need to be ambitious but realistic in what they are trying to achieve. The main focus of attention needs to be on the resources used as this is an area where parents most often raise concerns. You may not get everything you want but your involvement will help to shape what is implemented and minimise the harm to

all children.

## **7. Seek to avoid conflict**

It is very important that conflict is avoided. The protests in Birmingham were brought about by parents feeling that their concerns were not being taken seriously. The protests were taken after parents tried and failed to engage with the schools and were rebuffed. We cannot afford for this to be repeated so we have to urge schools to engage in a meaningful process that avoids conflict. Work with schools in that spirit and be clear you want to engage with schools and for schools to engage you in the consultation process.

## **8. Influence which resources are used**

There are no popular resources that are entirely perfect or are totally bad. Rather there are good and bad aspects in many resources from a moral standpoint. When you engage with a school be clear on what types of resources you like and which you believe are not age appropriate or sensitive to the faith background of pupils at the school. Focus on providing

constructive feedback based on this approach.

## **9. Be persistent**

As well as being constructive and positive it is also important to recognise that change in any walk of life does not come easily, they require persistence, and voicing your views despite opposition or obstacles. You may not get all of the things you want but engaging with schools through the consultation process will ensure the resources and programme will be more suitable to the needs of your children

## **10. Become a governor**

Where possible, consider being part of the governing board of your local school. This is a very important role as this is where policies are written and decisions that will impact your children are made.

# RE LEARNING OUTCOMES

**By the end of primary school pupils should know:**

## **Families and people who care for me**

- That families are important for children growing up because they can give love, security and stability.
- The characteristics of healthy family life, commitment to each other, including in times of difficulty, protection and care for children and other family members, the importance of spending time together and sharing each other's lives.
- That others' families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children's families are also characterised by love and care for them.
- That stable, caring relationships, which may be of different types, are at the heart of happy families, and are important for children's security as they grow up.
- That marriage/civil partnership represents a formal and legally recognised commitment of two people to each other which is intended to be lifelong.
- How to recognise if family relationships are making them feel unhappy or unsafe, and how to seek help or advice from others if needed.

## Caring friendships

- How important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends.
- The characteristics of friendships, including mutual respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, trust, sharing interests and experiences and support with problems and difficulties.
- That healthy friendships are positive and welcoming towards others, and do not make others feel lonely or excluded.
- That most friendships have ups and downs, and that these can often be worked through so that the friendship is repaired or even strengthened, and that resorting to violence is never right.
- How to recognise who to trust and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, how to manage these situations and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed.

## Respectful relationships

- The importance of respecting others, even when they are very different from them (for example, physically, in character, personality or backgrounds), or make different choices or have different preferences or beliefs.
- The conventions of courtesy and manners.
- The importance of self-respect and how this links to their own happiness.
- That in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due respect to others, including those in positions of authority.



- About different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders (primarily reporting bullying to an adult) and how to get help.
- What a stereotype is, and how stereotypes can be unfair, negative or destructive.
- The importance of permission-seeking and giving in relationships with friends, peers and adults.

## Being safe

- What sorts of boundaries are appropriate in friendships with peers and others (including in a digital context).
- About the concept of privacy and the implications of it for both children and adults; including that it is not always right to keep secrets if they relate to being safe.
- That each person's body belongs to them, and the differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe physical, and other, contact.
- How to respond safely and appropriately to adults they may encounter who they do not know.
- How to ask for advice or help for self and for others, and to keep trying until they are heard, including having the vocabulary and confidence to report concerns or abuse.
- Where to get advice from e.g. Family, school and/or other sources.

# RSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

**By the end of secondary school pupils should know:**

## **Families**

- That there are different types of committed, stable relationships.
- How these relationships might contribute to human happiness and their importance for bringing up children.
- What marriage and civil partnerships are, including their legal status e.G. That marriage and civil partnerships carry legal rights and protections not available to couples who are cohabiting or who have married, for example, in an unregistered religious ceremony.
- Why marriage is an important relationship choice for many couples and why it must be freely entered into.
- The characteristics and legal status of other types of long-term relationships.
- The roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to the raising of children.

How to: determine whether peers, adults or sources of information are trustworthy, judge when a family, friend, intimate or other relationships is unsafe (and to recognise this in others' relationships); and, how to seek help or advice, including reporting concerns about others, if needed.

## **Respectful relationships, including friendships**

- The characteristics of positive and healthy friendships (both on and offline) including: trust, respect, honesty, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships. This includes

different (non-sexual) types of relationship.

- How stereotypes, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (eg. How they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice).
- That in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due tolerance and respect to others and others' beliefs, including people in positions of authority.
- About different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help.
- That some types of behaviour within relationships are criminal, including violent behaviour and coercive control.
- What constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable.
- The legal rights and responsibilities regarding equality (particularly with reference to the protected characteristics as defined in the equality act 2010) and that everyone is unique and equal.

## Online and media

- Their rights, responsibilities and opportunities online, including that the same expectations of behaviour apply online and offline.
- About online risks, including that any material someone provides to another has the potential to be shared online and the difficulty of removing potentially compromising material placed online.
- Not to provide material to others that they would not want shared further and not to share personal material which is sent to them.
- What to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online.

- The impact of viewing harmful content.
- That specifically sexually explicit material often presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners.
- That sharing and viewing indecent images of children (including those created by children) is against the law.
- How information and data is generated, collected, shared and used online.

## Being safe

- The concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment and domestic abuse and how these can affect current and future relationships.
- How people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent, and how and when consent can be withdrawn (on and offline).

## Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

- How to recognise the characteristics and positive aspects of healthy one-to-one intimate relationships, which include mutual respect, consent, loyalty, trust, shared interests and outlook, sex and friendship.
- That all aspects of health can be affected by choices they make in sex and relationships, positively or negatively, e.G. Physical, emotional, mental, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing.
- The facts about reproductive health, including fertility and the potential

impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women.

- That there are a range of strategies for identifying and managing sexual pressure, including understanding peer pressure, resisting pressure and not pressurising others.
- That they have a choice to delay sex or to enjoy intimacy without sex.
- The facts about the full range of contraceptive choices and options available.
- The facts around pregnancy including miscarriage.
- That there are choices in relation to pregnancy (with medically and legally accurate, impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help).
- How the different sexually transmitted infections (stis), including hiv/aids, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including through condom use) and the importance of and facts about testing.
- How prevalence of some stis , the impact they can have on those who contract them and key facts about treatment.
- How the use of alcohol and drugs can lead to risky sexual behaviour.
- How to get further advice, including how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment.

# HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX AND GROWING UP



## Have regular ongoing discussions (Scrap Birds and the Bees)

It can be uncomfortable for you and your child if nothing is ever discussed and then suddenly everything is said in one go, this may also overwhelm your child. Start

to make discussions about the external realities, the behaviours we know they see, the things they may hear in the news and in popular culture. Solicit their questions and ask them to comment on things they see and hear.

## **You decide when to start, the earlier the better**

You are in competition with the environment that surrounds your child. There is no definitive starting age at which the shari'ah or parental theory clarifies the most appropriate starting age for sensitive discussions. Be aware of the the external realities, peer group pressure and the impact of popular culture that your child is exposed to. The most important thing is that you should be the one to answer your children's questions and raise these issues. (Boys go through puberty between 9-14 years old – the average age is **12**. Girls go through puberty between 8-14 years old - average age is **11**).

## **You know your child's developmental maturity better than anyone else**

Children differ by their age, experience, innate qualities or biology (male or female). Knowing how developmentally mature they are will enable you to decide when to raise certain sensitive topics or how much detail you need to go into when they ask questions.

## **Always try and understand your child's world**

Don't assume you know what they are going through fully. The world they inhabit is completely different to the world you may have grown up in, even if you were born and brought up in this country. Mobile phones, the internet, social media, popular culture; the new norms are different.

## **Agree a plan together**

As your child's father and mother, you are a team. A successful team requires clear goals, communication, and working together to achieve them (division of labour). Discuss questions your child has raised and how you answered them, what needs to be raised and who will initiate or address this.

## **Assure them no question is off limits**

If you tell them, as you should, that they can come to you with any question or concern, don't be angry when they do. If they don't come to you, who do they go to?

## **Expect the best, prepare for the worst**

Don't assume your child is perfect, but don't think your child is a little shaytan. Build clear behavioural expectations but acknowledge they may not meet them all of the time – growing up, did you? Don't confuse this with green lighting bad behaviour.

## **Share and live your values**

Your children will more often than not do what you **do** rather than what you **say**. If you believe in your values, live them, then convey them through word and deed. If they see a contradiction between what you do and what you say, this will undermine your position. We will all make mistakes, so when we do own the mistakes, they will respect you for that, and show them that we do all fall short from time to time. The best of those who sin are those who make repentance.

We can also be very keen to share our values with our children when they are younger, as they soak up our values with ease, we tend not to continue this as they get older, when it's just as important.

## **Use real life situations**

Use relevant situations to raise issues, preferably realities they can relate to or are aware of. Even those they talk to you about or read about in novels, see on the TV, come across through popular culture.

## **Listen and ask questions – dialogue not monologue**

Think back to when you were lectured in the past about something you did or were meant to do. How did it make you feel, how did you respond, were you receptive to the contents of the 'lecture'. Children, probably no one, responds to a lecture. Try and create a discussion, better still help your child come to the conclusion themselves, that can be more powerful and builds thinking skills.

## **Reinforce, reinforce, reinforce**

Don't expect them to remember everything they are expected to do, reminders benefit (those who fear Allah). Reinforcement can take the shape of modelling behaviours, revisited conversations or through teachable moments.



# A SIMPLE FRAMEWORK

The framework below has been designed to support Muslim parents with the question, ‘when do I start discussing sex and growing up with my children?’

There is no simple answer, some discussions should occur before bodily changes, others will be prompted by our proactive responses to the world around our children and others will be in response to questions our children come to us with. The bottom line is we have to take proactive measures to instil our values in our children so they can reflect our values in their lives.



## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS

Bodily changes such as puberty and the start of periods have to be discussed before they happen.



## TEACHABLE MOMENTS

Using real life situations to raise discussions can allow children to not only understand Islamic value perspectives but is a proactive and natural way to broach sensitive issues.



## HONEST ANSWERS

It's important that you become the go to person for your child's difficult questions. Your response will determine whether they come back to you. Responding truthfully builds trust but don't forget you don't have to say everything. You are best placed to understand the age and developmental maturity of your children.



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