

RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION

FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS
(2020)



**A PRACTICAL
TOOLKIT FOR
TEACHERS**

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+ INTRODUCTION

The Department for Education has issued statutory guidance which will make Relationships Education compulsory in all primary schools from September 2020 and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) compulsory in all secondary schools. Health Education will be compulsory in all schools, except schools in the independent sector. Primary schools will have the option of delivering Sex Education but this is not compulsory.

The statutory guidance has been updated from previous guidance that was issued in 2000 to reflect contemporary families, relationships and legislation. There is an expectation that primary schools teach children different types of relationships including single-parent families, same-sex parents, foster parents and adoptive parents. There is also a requirement to teach young people about online relationships and how to stay safe online. The guidance therefore reflects the reality of life in the twenty-first century.

In primary schools the guidance focuses on the characteristics of positive relationships with specific emphasis on friendships, family relationships and relationships with peers. The curriculum in the guidance is designed to teach children about appropriate ways of treating others, including the need for kindness, consideration, respect, honesty, truthfulness, permission-seeking and personal boundaries. It requires schools to teach children about the features of healthy relationships, including friendships, so that they can identify unhealthy relationships when they encounter them.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the guidance is the requirement to teach children about parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. The guidance clearly states that children should not experience stigmatisation on the basis of their home circumstances. However, it also states that *'the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching, so that the topics that are included in the core content... are appropriately handled'* (DfE, 2019a, p 12). In addition, the guidance states that *'schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships'* (DfE, 2019a, p 12) and that schools must comply with the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are protected characteristics. The guidance also emphasises the need for *'age appropriate teaching'* (DfE, 2019a, p 8) and advises schools to *'ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content'* (DfE, 2019a, p 15).

Parental protests outside schools in England featured in media headlines in 2019. The protests were in opposition to a school's LGBT curriculum. The opposition was based on religious arguments. The protests were also replicated across other schools. Opposition to LGBT identities and same-sex relationships serves to highlight the tensions between religion and sexuality/gender. The statutory guidance clearly states that all schools must have a written policy in place that '*meets the needs of pupils and parents and reflects the community they serve*' (DfE, 2019a, p 11). The guidance merely stipulates the content that must be taught but does not specify how that content should be taught.

It is clear that schools in some communities will experience greater challenges in implementing aspects of the guidance. Although parents do not have a right to withdraw their children from Relationships Education, there is a need to provide school leaders with clear advice on how to respond to these challenges. The requirement that teaching should be both '*sensitive and age appropriate*' (DfE, 2019a, p 15) is also problematic given that many children live in same-sex relationships or have family members who identify as LGBT. For these children, LGBT identities and same-sex relationships reflect their lived realities and therefore to omit this from the curriculum of very young children could result in stigmatisation and perpetuate a sense of exclusion. These issues highlight that the implementation of the statutory guidance is not necessarily going to be straightforward and the fact that schools are free to determine how to implement the guidance does not provide reassurance that the framework will be addressed using a consistent approach by all schools.

This book will address these challenges. The structure of the chapters broadly reflect the framework but there are some slight variations. For example, Chapter 2 addresses character education but this is embedded throughout the framework rather than being identified as separate curriculum content. This book also addresses Health Education, which is a mandatory part of the framework.

+ CHAPTER 1

FAMILIES

CHAPTER OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter you will understand:

- + what is meant by the word ‘family’ within the context of Relationships Education in school;
- + the key characteristics of healthy family life;
- + the different types of families and family units;
- + the legal duties owed by teachers and school staff towards children of LGBT parents;
- + the role of consultation when addressing parental resistance;
- + the responsibilities of primary schools in relation to the teaching of marriage;
- + the characteristics of unhealthy family relationships.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will introduce you to the word ‘family’ within the context of Relationships Education. It describes some family units and structures and it outlines the common characteristics that underpin all of these. The chapter also provides several examples of these family units and structures to support you in understanding the concept of family within Relationships Education. Additionally, the chapter outlines the characteristics of healthy family life and the different types of families and family structures that children must be taught about. In doing so, it highlights a range of examples to support your understanding of children’s lived realities. We also outline the implications of the statutory guidance in relation to families with LGBT members. In doing so, we highlight the legal responsibility of schools to protect children of LGBT parents from discrimination. The chapter discusses the challenges that schools may face in relation to opposition and it considers the implications of these for faith schools and those with religious character. Some guidance is offered to support schools to address parental resistance and we emphasise the importance of consultation when determining how and when specific content is taught. The chapter also explores the requirement of primary schools to teach children that marriage is available to both opposite-sex and same-sex couples. It provides some discussion in relation to this teaching and offers guidance on ‘age appropriate’ teaching. The characteristics of unhealthy families and other relationships are also outlined to support your understanding of emotional abuse and neglect.

WHAT IS FAMILY?

Within the context of Relationships Education in school, the word ‘family’ is used to describe a unit or structure that provides love, security and stability for its members. It might typically include members who are biologically related, although this is not always the case. Some children are raised in family structures where there is no biological relationship between any of the members or some of the members. Families do not have to include children and can vary in size, and marriage does not have to be a feature of family life.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- + How would you describe your family structure?
- + Why do you think the statutory guidance emphasises the importance of teaching children about families?
- + How can families support the well-being of their members?

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HEALTHY FAMILY LIFE

Regardless of the family structure there are specific characteristics associated with healthy families. Healthy families provide their members with love, care, security and stability. Within the context of a healthy family, members demonstrate a commitment to each other, particularly in times of difficulty. They also provide each other with protection and care and they value spending time with each other and sharing each other's lives (DfE, 2019a).

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FAMILIES

Traditional family units which consist of a mother and father who are married and have children are only one type of unit. Within Relationships Education children must be taught about the vast range of family structures that reflect their lived realities. Family forms may include: single parents; LGBT parents; families headed by grandparents, older siblings, aunts or uncles; adoptive parents; foster parents; and carers. This list is not exhaustive.

It is important that your lessons consider the family structures that children in your class belong to. In addition, it is essential that children are not stigmatised on the basis of their home circumstances (DfE, 2019a). Essentially, children need to recognise that families may look different but that healthy families have certain characteristics in common, including the provision of love, care and stability.

FAMILIES WITH LGBT MEMBERS

The statutory guidance states that *'schools should ensure that all of their teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content'* (DfE, 2019a, p.15). Schools must ensure that they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, given that both sexual orientation and gender reassignment are protected characteristics. Schools therefore have a duty to protect children of LGBT parents from discrimination.

The statutory framework provides schools with the freedom to decide how to teach children about LGBT identities. Although this should be a straightforward aspect to teach, parental protests in 2019 in opposition to the teaching of LGBT content to children in primary schools has illustrated the tensions between sexual orientation, gender identity and religion. The guidance clearly states that *'the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching so that the topics... are appropriately handled'* (DfE, 2019a, p 12). In addition, the guidance states that *'schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious'* (DfE, 2019a, p 12). The Relationships Education policy must be developed in consultation with parents.

The statutory guidelines raise several questions. These are outlined below.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- ✦ If parents object to the teaching of LGBT content, what are the implications for schools in relation to the implementation of the statutory guidance?
- ✦ If schools with a religious character are allowed to teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, what are the implications of this?

These are not easy issues for schools to resolve. Section 149 of the Equality Act (2010) places a duty on schools to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This is referred to as the Public Sector Equality Duty. Therefore, regardless of religious perspectives on sexuality and gender identity, schools have a legal duty to promote respect between different groups of people. Primary schools play a crucial role in encouraging children

to demonstrate respect for other people, regardless of belief or identity. The teaching of both LGBT identities/relationships and religious perspectives address specific fundamental British values, including the need for individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

The starting point for this debate is to understand fundamentally why all children need access to an LGBT curriculum. First, children need to know that LGBT people exist. Many children will already be aware of this because they may have parents, siblings and other family members who identify as LGBT. This raises the question of why it would not be age appropriate to teach LGBT content to very young children when LGBT identities are part of their lived experiences. Second, schools play a critical role in developing inclusive values and attitudes by teaching children that prejudice is not acceptable. Education should create well-rounded individuals who become good citizens. Children need to be taught about treating all people with respect, regardless of their differences. Through challenging prejudice and developing inclusive values and attitudes, schools can therefore advance an agenda for social justice. Third, regardless of personal or religious belief, children need to demonstrate respect towards LGBT people. They will meet LGBT people throughout their education, in the world of work and within their communities. LGBT people exist within all societies and many identify as LGBT and align with a specific religion or belief. These are facts. LGBT identities and relationships may not be acceptable within some religions, but regardless of this, children need to know that not only do LGBT people exist, but within the UK and in other countries, they have a legal right to exist and a legal right to enter into a same-sex relationship. Fourth, teaching children about LGBT identities and relationships addresses, in part, the school's legal duty to meet the provisions of the Equality Act 2010. Fifth, the RSE curriculum in primary schools focuses on relationships rather than sex. Sex Education is not compulsory in primary schools and even if schools choose to offer this, the content will cover the human life cycle, including reproduction. Finally, the RSE curriculum makes no attempt to promote a particular sexual orientation, gender identity or lifestyle.

ADDRESSING PARENTAL RESISTANCE

Following the implementation of the statutory guidance in September 2020, all primary schools must have a policy for Relationships Education that is published on the school website. The law requires primary schools

to consult with parents on the development of the policy. Consultation is a process which takes place over time. It provides parents with a formal channel for expressing their views. However, ultimately, it is the responsibility of schools to decide what is taught and how it is taught. Parental resistance to aspects of subject content in Relationships Education should not mean that sensitive topics are not taught. However, schools will need to be sensitive to the views of parents, particularly in relation to *how* subject content is taught rather than *what* is taught. The process of consultation is not to determine *what* it is taught. It is to determine *how* and *when* specific content is taught.

CASE STUDY

LGBT RELATIONSHIPS

YEAR 5, PSHE

A primary school planned to roll out an LGBT curriculum in Year 5. The school wanted the children to learn the vocabulary associated with sexual orientation and gender identity. The curriculum covered a range of terminology, including terms such as gender fluid, non-binary, cisgender and pansexual. The curriculum also covered homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, LGBT history and the celebration of LGBT identities through positive affirmation. In addition, the curriculum covered same-sex marriage. The school was situated in a predominantly Muslim community.

The school developed a consultation process with parents to provide them with a formal channel for expressing their views and concerns. This was not a single event but a process that took place over a period of time. School leaders used this process to introduce parents to the planned curriculum, to listen to their perspectives and to present a rationale to parents to justify the need for the curriculum. The school leaders viewed this process of engagement as a positive step through which a shared set of values could be developed. The aim of the consultation was to give parents a voice, to dispel myths and to strengthen relationships with the parents and community/religious leaders.

Parents of children in Year 5 were initially invited to a briefing event which was led by school leaders. An online questionnaire was also circulated to parents to provide those who could not attend the meeting with an

opportunity to have their say about the proposed curriculum. At the meeting, the leadership team initially thanked the parents for attending and explained that this was a process of genuine consultation rather than a tokenistic process. The leaders requested that parents initially listened to the proposals without interrupting the presentation and that there would be an opportunity to ask questions later. The presentation was structured to address the following aspects:

- + the RSE statutory guidance (DfE, 2019a);
- + the Equality Act (2010) and the relevant protected characteristics including religion or belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment;
- + the implications of the Equality Act (2010) for schools;
- + the fundamental British values and the implications of these for schools;
- + the rationale for the LGBT curriculum;
- + sensitivities in relation to religious views or beliefs;
- + an outline of the proposed curriculum;
- + dispelling myths.

During the presentation leaders emphasised that parents did not have the right to veto the content and did not have a right to withdraw their children from Relationships Education. However, school leaders acknowledged that parents would have conflicting views and reiterated that religious perspectives would be respected. Following the presentation, some of the resources that would be used to support curriculum content were shared with parents. Parents were also given an opportunity to review the unit plan and lesson plans. Governor attendance was required at the meeting to demonstrate governor and trustee support for the planned curriculum.

At the end of the meeting parents were invited to raise questions and concerns. Most of these related to the religious beliefs held by children and parents and the questions demonstrated that the teaching of LGBT content would undermine religious values. This was addressed by explaining to parents that the planned curriculum was not designed to promote a specific sexual orientation, gender identity or lifestyle and that children would be informed that although the religion states that LGBT identities are not recognised, these identities are recognised within the context of British law. This provided a link to fundamental British values.

Parents were invited to comment on how the statutory content in the RSE framework might be addressed. Some parents had specific concerns and were provided with an opportunity to discuss these with school leaders at a separate time. In addition, the consultation questionnaire was circulated to parents, religious leaders and governors to capture a wide range of views. Anonymous responses were not permitted because leaders wanted to follow up specific concerns and questions with individual parents following the completion of the questionnaire. The outcomes of the questionnaire were disseminated across all stakeholder groups.

The school provided an opportunity for leaders, governors, faith leaders and parents to form a working group to develop the curriculum. This demonstrated that the curriculum that was initially presented to parents at the consultation event was a draft curriculum rather than a final curriculum. The working group met for a term to develop the curriculum and the outcomes of this group were disseminated widely. The outcomes included a revised curriculum plan, an information leaflet for parents and a webpage to store the Relationships Education policy, the whole-school curriculum plan for Relationships Education, a specific section on LGBT related to the unit of work in Year 5. This enabled school leaders to make the content visible to all parents and other stakeholders. The minutes from the consultation events and working group were also placed on the website.

The leadership team addressed specific concerns by arranging meetings with individual parents. Five parents objected to the teaching of LGBT content and decided to hold a protest outside of the school. The school was concerned that this was the beginnings of co-ordinated activity because these parents had started to distribute leaflets to other parents and the leadership team became aware via other parents that closed groups had been created by these five parents on social media. These parents had started to gather outside of school and some staff and children felt intimidated by their presence. It was therefore determined that this was not a peaceful protest. The school leaders responded by requesting a meeting with the organiser. However, it became clear during the meeting that the organiser did not want to engage in constructive dialogue. Following this meeting the protests continued, so the school contacted the police and requested police presence outside the school. This could only be sustained for two days due to lack of police resource and following this the protests continued. The school contacted the local authority who advised the leaders to apply for an injunction to prevent the parents from protesting outside the school.

+ CONCLUSION

This book has provided an overview of the statutory framework for Relationships Education (DfE, 2019a). It has emphasised the importance of teaching children to develop caring friendships and respectful relationships. It has highlighted the importance of developing safe online relationships and the need to be a good digital citizen. It has emphasised the importance of children knowing about different types of identities and relationships, including LGBT relationships and same-sex marriage. In addition, this book has discussed the importance of children knowing how to look after their physical health and mental well-being.

There has been opposition to this framework. The requirement to teach children in primary schools about LGBT families and identities has been challenged by individuals and groups who feel that this is not age appropriate. This book has emphasised that schools play a critical role in educating children about diversity and in fostering inclusive values. We have argued that the term ‘age appropriate’ itself is controversial, given that many children will live in families that include LGBT parents and they may have siblings, cousins or aunts and uncles who identify as LGBT. Denying children access to a curriculum that promotes LGBT inclusion does not foster a sense of belonging for children who have families that are different to the majority of families. From the earliest possible age, children need to understand that LGBT identities and relationships are valid in British law and should be respected. This prepares children for life in modern Britain. In the implementation of this curriculum, schools must consult with parents. However, parents have no right to veto this curriculum and they have no legal right to withdraw their children from Relationships Education. If schools do not implement this guidance, this will allow prejudice to prevail. Schools play a crucial role in challenging prejudice and in helping children to foster inclusive attitudes and values. If schools fail to address this due to fear of parental backlash then they are letting children down.

Through the physical health and well-being curriculum which forms part of the statutory framework, schools also must address a range of controversial topics that may cause conflict with parental values. These

topics include drug and alcohol abuse, smoking, healthy eating, physical exercise, teeth hygiene, social media use and online gaming. Although children may be exposed to these at home, it is important that children understand that neglecting to look after one's physical and mental well-being can be unhealthy and lead to illness. Schools should address this sensitively and ensure that children do not feel stigmatised because of the choices that their family members make.

The Relationships Education guidance offers hope for a brighter future. It promotes the values of respect and care and it highlights the need for healthy lifestyles. It is a powerful curriculum which aims to eradicate prejudice, discrimination and stigma. It reflects the realities of life in modern Britain. It should support children to lead long, healthy and active lives as full members of the communities in which they live. It supports the development of positive character virtues which will enable children to form effective relationships and achieve long-term outcomes.

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