

# RELATIONSHIPS & SEX EDUCATION

FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS  
(2020)



**A PRACTICAL  
TOOLKIT FOR  
TEACHERS**

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# + MEET THE AUTHORS

**JONATHAN GLAZZARD**



Jonathan Glazzard is Professor of Inclusive Education at Leeds Beckett University. He is series editor for the Positive Mental Health series by Critical Publishing. Jonathan's research explores issues of inclusion, exclusion, marginalisation, disability, sexuality and mental health for children and young people. He is a researcher, teacher educator and author. Jonathan's background is in primary teaching and he is a Trustee on several multi-academy trusts.

**SAMUEL STONES**



Samuel Stones is a lecturer, researcher and doctoral scholarship student at Leeds Beckett University. He has co-authored texts for several publishers and has written extensively on inclusion and mental health. Samuel's research explores issues of inclusion, exclusion, marginalisation, sexuality and mental health for children and young people. He is a senior examiner and experienced assessor and also holds a national training role with a large multi-academy trust





# + INTRODUCTION

This book addresses the statutory guidance published by the Department for Education for Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in secondary schools. This guidance replaces previous guidance that was published 20 years ago. The new guidance reflects contemporary societal issues and ensures that young people understand what constitutes healthy relationships, including friendships, intimate relationships and marriage.

The statutory guidance includes important aspects of subject content including consent, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and sexual exploitation and coercion in relationships. In addition, young people must learn about the effects of pornography and online risks including grooming. There is an emphasis on young people understanding the characteristics of unhealthy relationships and on protecting their mental well-being. Abuse, female genital mutilation and honour violence are also identified as subject matter within the statutory guidance. It is important that children learn what is lawful and unlawful

The guidance states that young people should explore sexual orientation and gender identity '*at a timely point*' (DfE, 2019a, p 26) and also that '*schools may choose to explore faith, or other perspectives, on some of these issues in other subjects such as Religious Education*' (DfE, 2019a, p 26). A well-designed curriculum will ensure that young people recognise and understand the harmful effects of prejudice-based bullying and stereotypes. There is an emphasis on teaching young people about different types of relationships, including same-sex relationships, and same-sex marriage and on teaching children about the importance of mutual respect and self respect.

Character education is embedded through the guidance so that young people learn about the importance of positive character virtues within the context of relationships. Schools will need to take into consideration that the character virtues that are being promoted through both the formal and hidden curriculum may be different to the character virtues that are promoted within the context of families and communities.

In designing the RSE curriculum, schools will need to ensure that appropriate consultation has taken place with parents. Parents need to know

what will be taught, when it will be taught and how it will be taught. Parents retain the right to withdraw their children from Sex Education but not from Relationships Education.

This book addresses the content of the new statutory guidance. There are aspects of the guidance that will be more challenging for schools to address and these are highlighted throughout the book. The content of each chapter is supported by case studies of practice which are designed to support schools to implement the guidance.

# + CHAPTER 1

## FAMILIES

### **CHAPTER OBJECTIVES**

**After reading this chapter you will understand:**

- + the need to teach students about different types of relationships and families;
- + what to teach students in relation to marriage and the rights and protections it offers;
- + the characteristics of successful parenting and the responsibility of schools to support children to understand these;
- + that students must be taught to recognise and evaluate relationships and be able to report concerns they may have in relation to these.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter outlines the importance of teaching students to recognise and understand different types of families and relationships. It also outlines your roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting students to recognise that their peers may have different experiences in relation to the family structures that they are part of. The chapter offers guidance in relation to each of these to develop your understanding and it provides examples to support your teaching of these topics. The chapter also emphasises the importance of students understanding how relationships can contribute to mental well-being, and the common characteristics of healthy families are outlined. Guidance is provided on the teaching of marriage and some key facts are highlighted to support your planning and delivery of this topic. The requirements of the statutory guidance to teach students to understand the roles and responsibilities of parents are then discussed. Within this discussion the characteristics of successful parenting are outlined to support your teaching. Finally, the chapter argues that students must be taught to evaluate relationships and that they should understand how to seek help and share concerns should they need to.

## **TYPES OF RELATIONSHIPS**

The statutory guidance (DfE, 2019a) states that students should know that there are different types of committed, stable relationships. Students should therefore be taught about heterosexual relationships, same-sex relationships, marriage, civil partnership, co-habiting and other types of relationships. Essentially, regardless of the type of relationship, it is important that students understand how relationships can contribute to mental well-being. Students should be taught to understand that there are different types of families, including families with same-sex parents, foster or adoptive parents and those with single parents. Some children may be raised by siblings or other members of the extended family. Students need to understand that regardless of family structure, there are things that healthy families share in common. These include valuing time together, caring for one another, supporting each other emotionally and/or financially, respect for each family member and demonstrating love and commitment.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- + How have views on relationships changed over recent decades?
- + To what extent are commitment and stability important in relationships?
- + Why do you think the government wants students to learn about the importance of committed, stable relationships?

## MARRIAGE

Students need to understand that marriage constitutes a legally binding agreement and therefore carries legal rights and protections that are not available to couples who have chosen not to marry or to those who have married in an unregistered religious ceremony (DfE, 2019a). In addition, students need to understand that marriage is an important relationship choice and that it must be freely entered into (DfE, 2019a).

Important facts that students need to know about marriage are stated below.

- + Within marriage each person has a legal duty to financially support the other person.
- + Upon death, the surviving partner automatically inherits their partner's assets.
- + Both people have a legal right to live in the matrimonial home, regardless of who bought it.
- + Marriage must be conferred through a civil or religious ceremony. If it is conferred through a religious ceremony, the service will be conducted by a minister of the religion. If it is conferred through a civil ceremony, the service will be conducted by a registrar.
- + The legal age for marriage is 16 in England and Wales, although parental consent is required for those aged 16 or 17.
- + The 2013 Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Act legalised same-sex marriage in England and Wales. Prior to this legislation, from 2005 same-sex couples were allowed to enter into a civil partnership, which carried similar rights and protections to marriage.
- + Same-sex couples can marry in a civil ceremony, although they may marry in a religious ceremony if they secure agreement to marry from a religious organisation.

- + Some relatives are not legally allowed to marry.
- + Engagements show intent to marry but have limited status and there is no legal obligation to marry.
- + Marriage can take place in various places including a registered religious building, a registry office, approved premises, at home, in a hospital or prison.
- + Bigamy is a criminal offence in England and Wales.
- + Polygamous marriages may not be performed in the United Kingdom.
- + Remarriage is allowed in a civil ceremony providing that the previous marriage has been dissolved.

## **CRITICAL QUESTIONS**

- + How important is marriage within contemporary British society?
- + How do perspectives on marriage vary across cultures and societies?
- + To what extent does the RSE guidance promote marriage as an ideal?
- + Why do you think the government wants students to learn about the importance of marriage?

## **SUCCESSFUL PARENTING**

The statutory guidance (DfE, 2019a) states that students need to understand the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to raising children and the characteristics of successful parenting. These may include:

- + providing food, clothing and adequate shelter for their children;
- + nurturing the development of positive character virtues;
- + safeguarding their children from emotional/psychological, physical or sexual abuse and neglect;
- + ensuring access to education.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- + Are there any other characteristics of successful parenting that you think are important but are not identified on the above list?
- + How do perceptions of successful parenting vary across cultures and societies?
- + To what extent does parenting shape the development of young people's character?
- + Why do you think the government wants students to learn about the characteristics of successful parenting?

## EVALUATING RELATIONSHIPS

It is important that young people can determine whether a relationship within the family is safe or unsafe and to be able to recognise this in other people's relationships. It is also important that students know how to seek help if they feel that a relationship is unsafe and that they know how to report any concerns they have about other people's relationships.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

- + What are the characteristics of a safe relationship?
- + What are the characteristics of an unsafe relationship?
- + Is it right to intervene in someone's relationship if you have concerns about it?

## + CONCLUSION

This book has provided an overview of the statutory guidance for Relationships Education (DfE, 2019a). It has emphasised the importance of teaching young people 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 young people knowing about different types of identities and relationships, including LGBT relationships and same-sex marriage. In addition, this book has discussed the importance of young people knowing how to look after their physical health and mental well-being.

The guidance addresses subject content that reflects current societal issues. These include sexual violence and exploitation, online abuse, coercion, domestic violence and consent. It is important that schools address these issues so that young people can develop healthy relationships and recognise unhealthy relationships when they occur. It is important that schools address LGBT relationships and same-sex marriage so that the curriculum is inclusive of the needs of all students.

Through the physical health and well-being curriculum which forms part of the statutory guidance, schools also must address a range of controversial topics which may cause conflict with parental values. These topics include drug and alcohol misuse, smoking, healthy eating, physical exercise, social media use, online gambling and debt. Although young people may be exposed to these at home, it is important that young people 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 young people 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 young people 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 young people to form effective relationships and achieve long-term outcomes.

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