

PREVENTING SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN SCHOOLS

the role of PSHE education

Being proactive as well as responsive

- PSHE education lessons can provide an ideal context for addressing issues as they arise in the public consciousness. At the same time, lessons must not be reduced to this purpose, as it would undermine the subject's preventative role.
- The aim should be to ensure a carefully sequenced, spiral curriculum that revisits the relevant topic areas, each time extending and deepening learning in an age and developmentally-appropriate way.

Laying the foundations at KS1&2

- Although sexual harassment, abuse and violence would not be directly covered with young children, the foundations for this learning should be introduced from key stage 1 – including, for example, learning about: asking, giving and not giving permission; what makes a good friend; boundaries and privacy; and body parts that are private.
- This understanding will support primary pupils' current safety while preparing them for specific learning about sexual violence and sexual harassment at the secondary phase.
- When planning this content, make use of baseline assessments, local data and guidance from the PSHE Association [Programme of Study](#) and [Programme Builders](#), for example, to make decisions about what should be covered in each year group.

Relevant statutory content in the primary PSHE education curriculum

[Statutory RSHE guidance](#) includes requirements that KS1&2 pupils understand:

- *the characteristics of friendships, including mutual respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, kindness, generosity, trust, sharing interests and experiences and support with problems and difficulties.*
- *how to recognise who to trust and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, managing conflict, how to manage these situations and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed.*
- *practical steps they can take in a range of different contexts to improve or support respectful relationships.*
- *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.*
- *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.*

Addressing harassment and abuse directly at KS3&4

- The introduction of statutory RSHE will help to ensure all schools are responding to the needs and concerns of young people, including the prevalence of sexual harassment and violence.
- The [statutory RSHE guidance](#) identifies a wide range of relevant content in the secondary phase related to treating others respectfully, recognising unhealthy relationships and seeking support.
- This statutory guidance provides schools with an outline of what they need to cover, and the important knowledge that pupils should acquire, but PSHE education must also equip pupils with the skills and attributes to apply this understanding in the real world.

- The PSHE Association [Programme of Study](#) and [Programme Builders](#) exemplify how to integrate the statutory content into a comprehensive PSHE education programme.

Relevant statutory content in the secondary PSHE education curriculum

[Statutory RSHE guidance](#) includes requirements that KS3&4 pupils understand:

Respectful relationships, including friendships

- *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.*

Online and media

- *that specifically sexually explicit material e.g. pornography 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.*
- *what to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online.*
- *the impact of viewing harmful content.*

Being safe

- *the concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment, rape, domestic abuse, forced marriage, honour-based violence and FGM, 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 (in all contexts, including online).*

Intimate 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 there are a range of strategies for identifying and managing sexual pressure, including understanding peer pressure, resisting pressure and not pressurising others.*

Considering contributory factors

There is a need to tackle contributory factors and challenge a culture that allows such issues to arise. See for example our recent [teacher briefing](#) on addressing pornography through PSHE education, and the [accompanying paper](#) by Clinical Psychologist Dr Elly Hanson on the impact of pornography on young people.

Understanding the fundamentals of safe, effective practice

- Anyone covering such complex content should be given the training and pedagogical understanding to teach it safely and well.
- For example, establishing a safe learning environment with pupils before teaching takes places is crucial (see our [advice on handling complex issues in the classroom](#)).
- The PSHE Association [Future Learn course](#) covers this fundamental understanding and is now open for enrolment for a 24 May start.
- We also run a range of other [CPD training courses](#) on planning, assessment and individual aspects of the subject.

Choosing resources wisely

Teachers need resources they can trust, that have been assessed for their safe and effective approach to learning. The PSHE Association quality assurance process takes a rigorous approach to assessing the suitability and effectiveness of teaching resources. Relevant resources with the PSHE Association Quality Mark include:

- Resources to support the Home Office – ‘[Disrespect Nobody](#)’ and ‘[Something’s Not Right](#)’ campaigns
- Alice Ruggles Trust [Relationship Safety](#) resources
- Medway Public Health materials on ‘[Managing healthy and unhealthy relationships](#)’
- University of Exeter ‘[Working out relationships](#)’ lesson plans.

We also recommend consulting Government guidance ‘[Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges](#)’, which includes advice on how to help prevent and respond to issues.

Dedicating regular curriculum time to PSHE education

Well-planned, regular lessons are required to teach the knowledge and develop the understanding, skills and attributes that will support children and young people to build and maintain positive relationships, recognise unhealthy or abusive relationships, and keep themselves and others safe.

- Learning in PSHE education lessons can be complemented by other aspects of school life as part of the whole school approach. These include assemblies, focus days and one-off events. But it is important to remember that such input must only ever be used to *enhance* the taught curriculum and not to *replace* it.
- Assemblies and one-off events can offer a vehicle for raising awareness of issues, and can be memorable and impactful; however, the actual learning they provide is negligible unless it is embedded afterwards in subsequent lessons.
- Consider carefully whether a topic is appropriate to discuss in a setting such as an assembly, where the usual safe learning environment created in PSHE education lessons cannot be replicated. Pupils with increased vulnerability – or personal experiences of an issue – may find the content upsetting and there will be limited opportunity to discuss issues raised.

The PSHE Association is the national body for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education – the school curriculum subject that supports pupils to be healthy, safe and prepared for modern life. PSHE education incorporates health education, relationships education/RSE and economic wellbeing and careers.

A charity and membership organisation, the Association works to improve PSHE education standards by supporting a national community of teachers and schools with resources, training and advice.

Find out more and become a member at www.pshe-association.org.uk