

Frequently Asked Questions

The questions below were generated by delegates who attended the Department for Education funded webinars co-produced by nasen with the PSHE Association on the new statutory Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) curriculum.

How does the statutory RSHE fit into the PSHE programme?

PSHE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic) education has been a non-statutory curriculum subject for many years. Since September 2020, the Relationships Education and Health Education aspects are statutory in primary schools in England, and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education aspects are statutory in secondary schools. [Statutory guidance](#) outlines what schools must cover. Many schools have already been delivering much of this statutory content within the framework of a wider PSHE education curriculum. Delivering RSHE within a PSHE curriculum means schools can also continue to deliver important - and related - content such as economic wellbeing, preparation for careers and adult life. The [PSHE Association Programme of Study](#) is divided into three core themes; Health and Wellbeing, Relationships and Living in the Wider World and will enable you to deliver all of the statutory and non-statutory content.

Should it be called an RSHE policy rather than a PSHE policy?

The statutory guidance is clear that schools are required to have a Relationships Education / RSE policy. It is also advisable to have a PSHE education policy, but this is not a statutory requirement. Many schools combine their PSHE and RSE policy, whereas others choose to keep them separate. What the policy is called and how they are presented is up to the individual school, so long as the policy is clear and easy to find for parents, governors or other interested parties. The PSHE Association provides a template for support in writing a [Relationships and Sex Education policy](#).

How long do you think an RSHE lesson should be?

The PSHE Association recommends one hour per week for PSHE education, and all quality assured materials are based on 60 minute lessons. However, if working with pupils with SEND, teachers might find it more effective to deliver frequent, shorter sessions to enable opportunities to carry out baseline assessments or pre-teaching on a topic before the main delivery of the lesson. This would enable teachers to make adaptations to the lesson content based on what is discovered through the baseline assessments. Alternatively, teachers may find they require longer sessions, to allow time to set the climate for learning, fully engage with a topic, and 'close' the lesson effectively, without rushing through material. Teachers working with SEND pupils may also find that overlearning and revisiting topics in a variety of contexts is even more necessary and taught spontaneously in response to issues raised by pupils with SEND who may take longer to process the content.

Does everything in the statutory RSHE curriculum have to be taught at the year group it is stated in? If we do not think children are able to cope with certain content, can we teach it later on?

The Department for Education [statutory guidance](#) does not state in which year group content should be taught. The requirement is that all the RSHE primary content is taught by the end of primary school, and all secondary content by the end of secondary school. This gives schools the flexibility to decide in which key stage and year group content is taught, remembering that some content may be revisited multiple times in different contexts as pupils progress through the school. Planning tools such as the [PSHE Association Programme Builders](#) help to demonstrate how this could be organised into year groups and half termly topics, but these are intended to be used flexibly and adapted to best meet the needs of your pupils in your school. Schools should use national and local health data, pupil voice activities, and their own knowledge of pupils' needs to decide the best curriculum approach for their setting.

What do we do for children that may be chronologically in one year group but may be at a lower emotional or cognitive stage if we have to make it age appropriate? Can we still differentiate?

It is important to find ways to differentiate that meet the learning needs of the pupils, whilst still recognising the concerns and experiences that are relevant to their age group. For example, concerns about relationships for primary school pupils are likely to be mostly centred in family and friend relationships, whereas secondary aged pupils are concerned with more complex peer relationships. Having said this, some pupils or class groups are also emotionally young and may not be ready or mature enough for some content. Teachers will therefore need to make a judgement about when it is appropriate to introduce content, while ensuring all statutory content is covered before the end of the primary or secondary phase. The [Planning framework for pupils with SEND](#) will help to suggest suitable outcomes for pupils in each key stage, at various entry points based on their learning needs. This will enable schools to plan bespoke lessons effectively.

Is there any training for staff on the RSHE curriculum and approaches?

It is important that in-school training is delivered to all members of staff in the school, as all staff need to be aware of the school's approach to RSHE and its links to safeguarding. As a school community, agreeing on your ethos, values and aims for the subject will help all staff to recognise its important role in keeping children and young people safe and can ensure they respond to parents or pupils appropriately if asked questions relating to topics pupils will have been learning about. The Department for Education has produced [teacher training modules for RSHE](#) which are suitable for other staff to access. PSHE Association offers a range of [training courses](#) for its members, including the beginner course Understanding PSHE and [Ask a Subject Specialist video series](#) and the free FutureLearn course [PSHE education: Helping children navigate a complex world](#). The Sex Education Forum holds training courses for school staff that can be commissioned specifically for your setting.

How can we support and increase teacher confidence to start difficult or sensitive conversations?

This very much comes down to CPD opportunities to explore those teacher values discussed in the training session. The DfE module [Training module for RSHE for pupils with SEND](#) has a section devoted to supporting staff to feel confident and handling difficult conversations. Having time to explore what makes the topic difficult and rehearse the possible scenarios and unpick the key issues will be time well spent to support staff. Teachers should also remember to use negotiation of ground rules as a way to familiarise themselves with their classes and to revisit when discussing more sensitive topics; this can help make all people (both staff and pupils) more comfortable and recognise where the boundaries are in terms of what is and isn't appropriate – such as no personal questions. The PSHE Association has more advice on [Handling complex issues safely in the PSHE classroom](#).

How do I use the SEND Planning framework with the Programme Builders framework from PSHE Association within a mainstream class?

The PSHE Association [Programme Builder](#) helps schools with long to medium term planning, starting with their curriculum map for the school year, and then breaking down to key learning aims for each unit of work. The [Planning framework for pupils with SEND](#) is intended to help teachers plan specifically for their SEND pupils, whether as a whole class or for individuals. If teaching PSHE education in a mainstream class, start by using the programme builders to create long and medium term plans for the year and for each half term. For example, you may plan a unit of work on Healthy lifestyles for Year 9, to be delivered in Spring 2, and select the following suggested outcomes:

- about the relationship between physical and mental health
- about balancing work, leisure, exercise and sleep
- how to make informed healthy eating choices
- how to manage influences on body image
- to make independent health choices

Teachers may find some of these are less suitable for the SEND learners in their class, so should then look at the planning framework for pupils with SEND, in healthy lifestyles KS3-4, and decide which outcomes are more achievable for their learners with SEND. For example:

- Foundation: identify different kinds of physical activity and exercise
- Core: Describe our favourite foods and drinks, and give reasons for our choices
- Development: Describe some of the physical and mental health benefits of regular exercise

These outcomes will then give a clear idea of how to adapt in-class lesson activities to allow SEND learners to still access the learning, make progress and achieve, whilst participating in the lesson in a way that is appropriately matched to their needs.

How can we increase the profile of PSHE?

PSHE education should be at the heart of the school's ethos and can help to build the school's sense of community. For example, pupils' work from PSHE education could be displayed in prominent places around the school, particularly displays highlighting support services or where to go for help and advice. The PSHE curriculum can also help input to pastoral elements in the school; by matching PSHE topics to assembly themes or national events such as Mental Health awareness week, Autism Awareness month, Internet Safety Day, LGBT and Black History months, Anti-Bullying week etc. This can help to give pupils a real-world context for PSHE topics and bring the whole school community on board with the same message. It is also very important to get buy-in from senior leadership – the PSHE Association [explainer slides](#) about statutory changes may help you to outline the benefits and importance of PSHE education.

How can PMLD pupils fully access the RSHE curriculum?

This is very much about pitching the learning at the appropriate stage of the pupils. The PSHE Association planning framework for pupils with SEND 'Encountering' stage is very much geared towards those learners working at a sensory engagement level and this should support your differentiation of the statutory RSHE content. There should also be a recognition that young people's bodies may continue to develop at a more chronological rate and they need to be prepared for the hormonal and body changes, as will their parents/carers.

What support and guidance are there for communicating with parents of pupils with SEND?

You probably already have great relationships with your parents/carers and in the first instance it could be that you look at the planned opportunities you have in your calendar for engaging with parents, and utilise those. There are a number of ideas and case studies in the [Department for Education support guidance](#) that you may wish to consider, particularly for parents of pupils with SEND. The PSHE Association has [guides for parental engagement](#) which include a range of useful strategies, a template letter and workshop plan for delivering a parent engagement workshop. During recent lockdown measures, some schools have found that online methods to communicate with parents, such as holding online meetings, carrying out surveys or sharing information on the school's website has been extremely helpful.

It can be that pupils know the theory on safe practice and responsible behaviour, and all say the "right" things in lessons, but then some don't practise it in the real world. How can we improve this?

Learners with SEND (and often those without) require overlearning and learning in context. Delivering these topics in the classroom without additional support from parents/carers to reinforce at home and out in the community means that the practice becomes something they learn and do 'at school'. Developing those home/school links and giving tasks to practise those skills in the correct context will aid generalisation and support application in the real world.

How can we support parents who do not see the relevance of sex education for their children?

The role of relationships and sex education in the curriculum is to safeguard all pupils, giving them the understanding they need to navigate their lives now and in the future. All pupils have a right to understand concepts such as consent, private vs public, appropriate vs inappropriate touch, and what to do if left feeling unsafe or uncomfortable by a relationship, to name just a few. Engaging with parents should focus on the importance of the subject for keeping all pupils safe, happy and healthy, no matter what kind of relationships they are likely to have in the future. Ensuring the parents are aware of what is to be taught, and how and when this will be delivered, should open discussions to enable parents to see the relevance for their child. Do remember that sex education is still the only part of the RSHE curriculum that parent carers have the right to opt out of and this needs to be respected.

How best can we consider and incorporate pupil views within RSHE?

Pupils are often able to give very thoughtful and honest insights into the learning they need in PSHE education, including about relationships, sex and health, and when they need it. Encouraging pupil voice can be as straightforward as asking pupils to evaluate a topic when they have finished, for example asking questions such as: “What did you learn from this unit of work?” “Is there anything else you would like to know about the topic?” “Do you think you’ve learned this topic at the right time – or would it be better for pupils who were younger/older?”. These evaluation snapshots can help teachers amend planning for future year groups. For teachers who are making bigger changes to their PSHE curriculum plan, they might wish to carry out a [pupil questionnaire](#) to discover pupil’s views about what they are currently taught, or to deliver a [pupil voice lesson](#), which gives pupils the time and opportunity to discuss which topics in PSHE education matter the most to them. These insights can then be used to shift the focus in curriculum time or to introduce new and previously underrepresented issues.

Several of the strategies used in PSHE education involve empathy or distancing - what alternatives are there for students who struggle with this concept?

It may be that for pupils with SEND you have to start from their own personal experience and that distancing is not used in the first instance or introduced after pupils have understood the initial concepts. However, many pupils with SEND find the use of characters, video clips or social stories a supportive and relatable way to access the content. It is very much dependent on the setting as well; if you know that a pupil may have difficulties with distancing and reveal personal information that may be of a sensitive nature, then pre-teaching may be a suitable strategy to explore the issues before the lesson and teach the social skills alongside. If the setting is more specialist and the issues explored are of a personal nature, then the teacher should be quite adept at handling those questions. Supporting the development of empathy should also be part of the teaching and for those pupils who may find this difficult, overlearning and revision of these concepts are useful approaches.

If working with pupils with ASC and we have concerns around the healthy eating information affecting their diet, how can we address this as teachers are not health professionals?

If you have health professionals, such as a school nurse, that can work closely with the school to support this that would be the best option. However, we know that not all settings have access to this, so working with parents and carers and the pupils themselves and taking the time to explore the topics in-depth at their level of understanding is key. Taking time to explore, ask questions and do this in different contexts - so maybe they need to have this reinforced in the lunch hall for example. It may be useful to explore with staff the language used around the topic to ensure consistency and clarity (for example, eliminating such phrases as “That food is bad for you” and replacing with “healthy to less healthy” on a continuum).

What can we do to support pupils as they reach puberty if their cognitive ability limits their understanding?

It is important that pupils understand what is going to happen to their body before puberty begins. It is essential to be really clear on what will happen at a level of communication that will be appropriate for them. Using anatomically correct dolls to enable visualisation of the growth of hair for example will be a supportive child-friendly way to approach this topic. They will have all the hormones and the physical features of puberty and if this is not explored this could be potentially distressing for them. Quality assured resources such as [Medway Public Health's Relationships and sex education programme](#) might be a useful place to start adapting lessons from. Reading the Sex Education Forum e-magazine [The Puberty Issue](#) may also inform your thinking.

How can we best assess RSHE?

As with any other subject on the curriculum, our focus for assessment should be on measuring pupils' learning progress. In PSHE education, it is recommended to start with a 'baseline assessment' before teaching takes place or at the start of the lesson. This can help teachers to recognise what pupils already know about a topic, where there are gaps in their understanding and where they may have misconceptions. This supports high quality planning to help reinforce existing knowledge, fill in gaps and correct any inaccuracies pupils may have about a topic. Teachers can then conduct an endpoint assessment after the lesson or series of lessons, to measure what has been learned. In many cases, this may be returning to the baseline assessment and adding or amending it in the light of new learning, or it may be a summative task which demonstrates all the learning that has taken place. More detailed guidance and examples of pupil assessments can be found in the [PSHE Association's Guides to assessment](#).

Are there any resources to support the teaching of criminal exploitation?

The PSHE Association has developed lesson plans to support this accessed here: [Preventing Involvement in Serious and Organised Crime by the Home Office | www.pshe-association.org.uk](#)