



PLANNING FOR LIFE AFTER 16

Sex and relationships

Learning about sex and relationships

As you will know, the pre-teen and teenage years involve a number of physical, mental and emotional changes that transform young people from children into adults. All young people need to be prepared for what can be a difficult period of their lives with information and advice on:

- > The physical changes associated with puberty
- > What sex involves
- > Safe sex and contraception
- > Handling relationships

All schools are required to deliver, at the very least, a basic level of SRE (Sex and Relationships Education) and some provide much more than this. Do take the trouble to find out what your son or daughter's school offers so that, if necessary, you can try and negotiate improvements. You might, for example, feel the school should provide a more comprehensive programme of SRE, teach it in a different way, or arrange extra help for those students with SEN who need it. See below for more information about the duties on schools and parents' rights to have their views heard. Other organisations, such as youth groups, may also offer SRE.

The ultimate responsibility for supporting our children through adolescence must however lie with parents – especially so, perhaps, in the case of children and young people with speech and language difficulties. We, after all, know them better than anyone, can usually judge how little or how much to say at any one time, and can tell when we might need to revisit the subject. So it is important to make sure you know what your son or daughter will be learning at school or elsewhere so that you can reinforce and supplement the information as required. See the links below for help with this.

Sex and relationships education

All schools must teach the biological aspects of puberty and reproduction specified in the National Curriculum for science. Primary schools are not required to provide any additional SRE, though some may choose to do so. Secondary schools must at the very least also provide information about:

- > STIs (sexually transmitted infections) and HIV/Aids
- > Marriage and its importance for family life and bringing up children and
- > They should not expose young people to teaching and materials which are inappropriate, taking account of the age and religious and cultural background of the pupils concerned.

All state schools must draw up a written policy, which parents have the right to see, setting out what SRE they provide over and above the content specified in the science curriculum, or if they are a primary school and have decided not to do so, that fact. Parents have the right to withdraw their child from all or part of any SRE provided outside the science curriculum.

For more information about schools' statutory duties to deliver SRE, see these factsheets from FPA (The Family Planning Association): <http://tinyurl.com/qcnuj7n> and the Sex Education Forum: <http://tinyurl.com/nu2jdyk>.

The Government has issued statutory guidance on SRE in schools, which you can download here: <http://tinyurl.com/qevhlvw>.

Statutory means that school governing bodies must take its recommendations into account when drawing up their policy on SRE. The guidance, which contains a whole section on working with parents, states that:

- > SRE should be firmly rooted in the framework for PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education)
- > Schools have a clear duty to ensure that children with SEN and learning difficulties are properly included in SRE – some ways of doing this are suggested.
- > Schools should take account of parents' views when formulating their SRE policy. This is likely to be helpful if you wish to challenge or query any aspect of SRE at your son or daughter's school.

The Government no longer publishes any statutory guidance for youth groups, but local authorities may have their own policies or guidelines. For more information about any SRE provided by your son or daughter's youth group, ask a member of staff.

SRE for Children and Young People with SEN

Children and young people with most forms of SEN need SRE that:

- > Follows a structured progression, building on what the children and young people have already been taught from primary school onwards and
- > Allows for regular revisiting of the subject in case there is anything they have forgotten, not really understood, or need to cover in more detail.

SRE is likely to pose particular challenges for young people with speech and language difficulties. They may find any or all of the following much harder than other young people:

- > Learning the new vocabulary
- > Understanding the new concepts
- > Asking questions about anything they do not understand
- > Dealing with their emotions
- > In due course, managing the practicalities of dating and relationships.

Specialist speech and language schools and some language units will take this into account when designing their SRE curriculum. If your son or daughter attends any other type of setting, it is important to check what support their school or youth group can provide to enable them to access SRE. This might take a number of forms, such as:

- > Easy read booklets or other accessible materials for use in class
- > Extra sessions where a member of staff might work through the materials with a small group, or an individual student, to make sure they understand the vocabulary and content and/or
- > A tailored course which might include rehearsing some real-life scenarios and ways of dealing with them.

Note, too, that some other forms of support might cover aspects of SRE. Social skills groups may include work on dealing with relationships for example. See the factsheet *Making and Maintaining Friendships* for more information about social skills courses.

Making the Case for Improved SRE

If you feel that the SRE at your son or daughter's school or youth group does not take sufficient account of their speech and language difficulties, do raise your concerns. Point out that they have a legal duty under the 2010 Equality Act to make reasonable adjustments to ensure your son or daughter is able to access the lessons. You can also ask for appropriate accessible SRE to be included on their IEP and/or Transition Plan, if they have one. For more information about Transition Plans, see the factsheet *The Transition Process*.

In some cases, it may be helpful or necessary to get accessible SRE specified on your son or daughter's statement. If they do not have a statement but clearly need considerably more or different support than other young people the same age, they are likely to be entitled to one. Remember that, provided your son or daughter is below 16, you have a legal right to request statutory assessment, the process that must, in law, precede the issuing of a statement. If you think your son or daughter needs a statement, you should do this immediately. For more information about statements and the statutory assessment process, ring the **Afasic Helpline on 0300 666 9410**.

If you are not happy with the general content of the SRE at your son or daughter's school or youth group, you can and should raise this with them. If you know other parents who think the same way it is probably better to work together as this gives you a stronger voice. Address your concerns initially to the Head Teacher and then, if necessary, to the Board of Governors. In the case of a youth group, speak first to the leader of the group and, if that does not produce a satisfactory outcome, the management team or organisation that runs the group.

Dating

The factsheet on *Social and Leisure Activities* contains lots of information about going out, having fun and meeting people. As well as helping your son or daughter to make friends this can also lead to them finding a boyfriend or girlfriend. There are other more direct methods, of course, such as speed dating, online dating and dating agencies. Some agencies specialise in people with disabilities and their details are listed below.

Sources of Further Information

General Information

The **Sex Education Forum**, a consortium of organisations and individuals committed to improving SRE for children and young people, has a website with lots of helpful guidance for parents, and sources of further information for young people: **www.sexeducationforum.org.uk**

The **Family Planning Association** website contains advice about talking to your children about sex. It includes sections relating to children of different ages, and with learning difficulties, see: **www.fpa.org.uk/help-and-advice/advice-for-parents-carers**.

They also have a range of publications for sale, see **www.fpa.org.uk/shop/home** and click on:

- > **Parenting and Families** for books and other materials designed to help parents discuss sex and relationships with children of various ages
- > **Working with Learning Disabilities** for books and materials designed to be used with people with learning disabilities
- > **Sex Education: SRE and PSHE Resources** for books and materials designed for use with young people

Contact-a-Family have a series of three booklets entitled *Growing up, sex and relationships*, While designed primarily with the needs of physically disabled young people in mind, they might also be useful for youngsters with other disabilities. You can obtain the booklets from the **Contact a Family helpline on 0808 808 3555** or download them here: **www.cafamily.org.uk/media/379598/growingupsexrelparents.pdf** for the parents' booklet

www.cafamily.org.uk/media/379646/growingupsexrel-youngpeople.pdf for the young people's booklet

www.cafamily.org.uk/media/379567/growingupsexrelteachers.pdf for the professionals' booklet

You can also download an article entitled *Learning Disabilities, Sex and Relationships* here: **www.cafamily.org.uk/news-and-media/learning-disabilities-relationships-sex-and-having-the-talk/**

The NHS Choices website contains a lot of information about puberty and talking to children of all ages about sex, see **www.nhs.uk/Livewell/puberty/Pages/pubertyhome.aspx**.

Information for Young People

Brook offers free and confidential information to young people under 25: **www.brook.org.uk**

Marie Stopes International have an informative website for young people: **www.likeitis.org**

The Site, a website for young people aged 16–25, run by Youth-Net UK, contains sections on *Your Body and Sex and Relationships*: **www.thesite.org**

Childline has a very helpful website for teenagers under 18, with an online problem page and facility to chat with an online counsellor. Its *Explore* area contains sections offering advice on *My Body and Sex and Relationships*. There are also a number of message boards on *Sex and Relationships*, *Sexual Identity*, *Health and Wellbeing* and other related topics: **www.childline.org.uk**

The Den, a website for young people run by the **Autism Education Trust** includes sections entitled *Health and Wellbeing and Friends and Relationships* with advice, mostly in the form of videos, on dating and sex, and you can also submit a question to their panel of experts: **www.autismeducationtrust.org.uk/theden**

The **Leeds Animation Workshop** has produced a film for people with learning disabilities about making friends and starting relationships. It is called **Getting Together** and costs £40 to buy or £10 to hire: **www.leedsanimation.org.uk/films/**

Wrong Planet, an American site for people with Asperger Syndrome and related conditions, has a number of articles and how-to guides on dating and relationships and also offers a discussion forum and chatroom: **www.wrongplanet.net**

Dating and Friendship Services for Adults with Disabilities

Outsiders: The Outsiders club offers physically and socially disabled people the chance to gain confidence, make friends and form new relationships. Membership is open to people over 16 living throughout the UK and beyond who are able to understand the concept of Outsiders and manage their own affairs, It is free for the first month and then costs £27.50 per year for the waged, or £14 for the unwaged. For more information, see: **www.outsiders.org.uk**

Stars in the Sky: This is a dating and friendship service run by and for adults (18+) with learning difficulties. There are a number of branches across the country. Membership costs £25 per year. For more information, see: **www.starsinthesky.co.uk**.

Afasic Services and Information

Disabled Children, Schools and the Equality Act 2010 / New Duty on Schools and Local Authorities to Provide Auxiliary Aids and Services to Children with Disabilities – free downloads, see: www.afasic.org.uk/help-for-your-child/free-downloads/

The Afasic helpline

Open 10.30 - 2.30, Monday - Friday

T: 0300 666 9410 or 0207 490 9420



Afasic - voice for life

T: 020 7490 9410 E: info@afasic.org.uk

Helpline: 0300 666 9410 www.afasic.org.uk