



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE



Sex Education in Scottish Schools

A Guide for Parents and Carers

guide

# What is this leaflet for?

The Scottish Executive has recently produced national advice and guidance on sex education. This leaflet describes what this will mean for your child. It outlines:

- what sex education will cover
- the home-school partnership and shared responsibilities on which effective sex education is based
- your rights as a parent/carer to be consulted, in advance, on the programme your child will receive
- your child's rights to have their views taken into account.

# A Guide for Parents and Carers

The leaflet considers five questions.

- What are schools expected to do?
- What is sex education?
- What will my child be taught?
- How will I be consulted?
- What can I do if I have concerns?

Please contact your child's school if you want more information. The headteacher, or another appropriate member of staff, will be happy to discuss what this means for your child.

It is intended that this guide will be useful for everyone, however, religious authorities with a role in denominational education have the right to provide guidance for their denominational schools. They may therefore choose to supplement this information for denominational schools.

# A Guide for Parents and Carers

## What are schools expected to do?

All schools are expected to provide sex education. The Scottish Executive has produced guidance for local authorities and schools. This requires that sex education should present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner within a framework of sound values.

Schools are expected to:

- make sure that sex education takes account of each child's age, understanding and stage of development
- work in partnership with parents
- have simple, direct procedures in place for parents to raise concerns
- have a method of consulting with pupils
- respect the different cultural, ethnic and religious environment of the home
- respect the different home circumstances and needs of all young people.

Great care is taken to emphasise the importance of relationships based on love and respect. Children and young people are encouraged to appreciate the value of stable family life, including the responsibilities of parenthood and marriage.

## What is sex education?

Sex education is an important aspect of every child's personal and social development. It aims to help young people make informed,

responsible and healthy choices about their lives, their relationships and their contribution to society.

To do this effectively young people will need opportunities to:

- gain information, knowledge and understanding about a wide range of issues
- develop and use the thinking, personal and social skills that will allow them to become confident in making the decisions and choices for themselves
- consider their own and other people's feelings, emotions and values
- learn about their rights and responsibilities as well as those of others.

Opportunities for this learning to take place effectively are most likely where schools, parents and others are able to work in partnership.

Sex education begins in the home where children first become aware of their growing bodies and how they are kept safe and cared for. The home is also the place where children begin to explore and understand their feelings and values and how they relate to the wider world around them.

From an early age young people are exposed to powerful and conflicting ideas about health, lifestyle and sexuality from television, magazines and their friends. Parents and schools share the responsibility for helping young people to make sense of these pressures and messages.

## What will my child be taught?

At school, sex education builds on what children already know. It is an integral feature of health education, education for personal and social development and, religious and moral education programmes. In addition, other curriculum areas such as environmental studies in the primary school and secondary school subjects such as science, home economics, physical education and social subjects all have important contributions to make.

Effective sex education, like other learning, builds progressively from stage to stage – from pre-school to upper secondary. Certain key features are central to any programme of sex education – no matter the stage. These include helping your child to consider:

- respect and caring for self and others
- respect for individual differences
- ways to express and deal with feelings and emotions
- ways to keep safe
- positive and supportive relationships.

Schools and local authorities have more detailed programmes. They often include contributions from others, such as the school nurse or other health professionals.

At the end of this leaflet you will find an example of what a sex education programme might look like at different stages of a child's school career.

*The topics will not necessarily be covered in your child's school in the order or at the stages shown. The school will be consulting you about their programme.*

## How will I be consulted?

It is important – for you as a parent/carer, for your child and for the school – that you are fully informed and consulted about the nature and purpose of the sex education your child will receive.

The national guidance expects schools to:

- have strategies to consult parents
- give advance information on the planned programme.

There are many ways for you to be involved and offer your views. Your child's school will offer a number of opportunities. The examples below show some of the ways different schools involve and consult parents.

- Parents' evenings, where health education issues are being discussed with opportunities to ask questions about the programmes
- Information about sex education in the school handbook or prospectus
- Health education working groups
- Workshops or information sessions where materials are on display
- Question and answer booklets
- Surveys to find out parents' views on the sex education programme.

# A Guide for Parents and Carers

## What do I do if I have concerns?

If you have a particular concern about the sex education being provided by the school for your child the first thing to do is to discuss it with your child's headteacher. He/she will do all they can to respond to your concerns.

Most parents/carers are happy to let their child take part in the sex education programme provided by their school. However, in some exceptional circumstances, there will be occasions when a parent/carer takes the view that this is an aspect of their child's education that they prefer to deal with only at home. This is their choice. However, parents/carers and the school must also take into account the child's views given the child's statutory right to education.

Where a parent/carer chooses to withdraw their child from the sex education programme they should talk to the headteacher. He or she will explain what arrangements can be made for the child. It is important to remember that aspects of sex education may be discussed in many areas of the curriculum. It would not be possible for a child to be withdrawn from lessons across the curriculum as this would prevent a child receiving an adequate and efficient education.

## Making it work well

Effective sex education depends on a partnership between home and school. Making this work well requires good communication, good relationships and building trust and confidence.

Where this happens it will be easier to help young people to make sound choices about their lifestyle and health.

This is *one example* of what a programme of sex education might look like. You can find out about what your child is being taught and when from your own school.

### The early years

- Awareness of the way bodies grow and change
- Uniqueness of their body
- Where living things come from
- Family and other special people who care for them

### Middle stages of primary school

- Exploring changes in the body
- How human life begins
- Being part of a family
- Dealing with bullying situations

### Upper stages of primary school

- Physical and emotional changes at puberty
- Body image and self-worth
- Understanding of own developing sexuality
- Developing an awareness of gender identity
- Changing nature of friendship
- Dealing with sexual feelings
- Menstruation, pregnancy and birth

### Early secondary stages

- Skills required to maintain friendships and relationships
- Gender stereotypes, equal opportunities and discrimination
- Peer and media influences
- Permanent and responsible relationships
- Parenting roles
- Contraception and family planning issues
- Awareness of sexually transmitted infections and HIV & AIDS and how to keep safe
- Awareness of risks and responsible strategies for keeping safe and healthy
- Information, advice and support services

### Middle to upper secondary stages

- Responsibility and commitment within relationships
- Awareness of sexual orientation
- Parental responsibility
- Responsible sexual behaviour
- Responsibilities and strategies for avoiding sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS
- Information, advice and support services



This leaflet is also available in Gaelic, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi, Malay, Punjabi, Urdu and Arabic, in Braille and on cassette.

Copies are available from your school or local authority.

Alternatively, additional copies of the leaflet may be obtained from:

Learning and Teaching Scotland (Customer Services)

Gardyne Road, Dundee DD5 1NY

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