

**engendering
change**

Preventing Child- on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment:

A Toolkit for Schools and Colleges

Written by Jo Morgan ©

As a city, Portsmouth is committed to ensuring that every young person grows up in an environment that is safe, respectful, and empowering. Schools play a vital role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours that will define the future of our communities. That is why this resource is so essential and I fully endorse it - it will support educators in taking a proactive approach to preventing child-on-child sexual violence and harassment.

I have long championed the need for clear, practical guidance for schools on this issue, and I am delighted to see this toolkit come to fruition. It provides not only vital information but also the tools and strategies needed to create a meaningful and lasting culture of respect and safety.

I have seen first-hand the impact that Jo Morgan and Engendering Change have had in transforming how relationships and sex education is delivered, equipping students with the knowledge and confidence to navigate their world safely. This new resource builds on that success, ensuring that every school has the framework to challenge harmful behaviours, empower young people, and foster a culture where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

I am confident that, with the implementation of this toolkit, schools will be better equipped than ever to tackle this issue head-on—creating safer spaces where every child can thrive.

Councillor Suzy Horton

**engendering
change**

The background of the page is a solid black field. Scattered across this field are various white characters, including lowercase letters (a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z), numbers (0-9), and punctuation marks (., !, ?, ", '). These characters are of different sizes and are oriented in various directions, creating a dynamic, abstract pattern.

engendering
change

Writted by Jo Morgan © Engendering Change Ltd
Supported by Portsmouth City Council

Contents

#	1	Introduction
#	2	The Prevalence of Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment
#	3	Preventing Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment through a Whole School Approach
#	4	Preventing Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment through Relationships and Sex Education
#	5	Teaching Toolkit



1

Introduction

1 Introduction

The Ofsted Review into Sexual Abuse in Schools and Colleges (2021) revealed that child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment are far more prevalent than adults realise. This was reaffirmed in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2022, 2023, and 2024), which emphasises that all schools, from primary through to secondary and college, should maintain an attitude of ‘it could happen here.’ School and college leaders are urged to understand and acknowledge the issue and implement rigorous preventative measures through Relationships and Sex Education, within the framework of a whole-school approach.

Co-produced with young people and teachers in Portsmouth, this practical toolkit aims to empower educators by helping them understand why and how they can proactively prevent child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment.

While this resource is primarily intended for secondary schools and colleges, child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment are increasingly affecting primary schools. This guidance provides a starting point for teachers and support staff to adopt preventative approaches. Each school remains responsible for ensuring their approach is appropriate to their specific context.

For key definitions, including of sexual violence and sexual harassment see p.111 - 115 of KCSIE (2024)

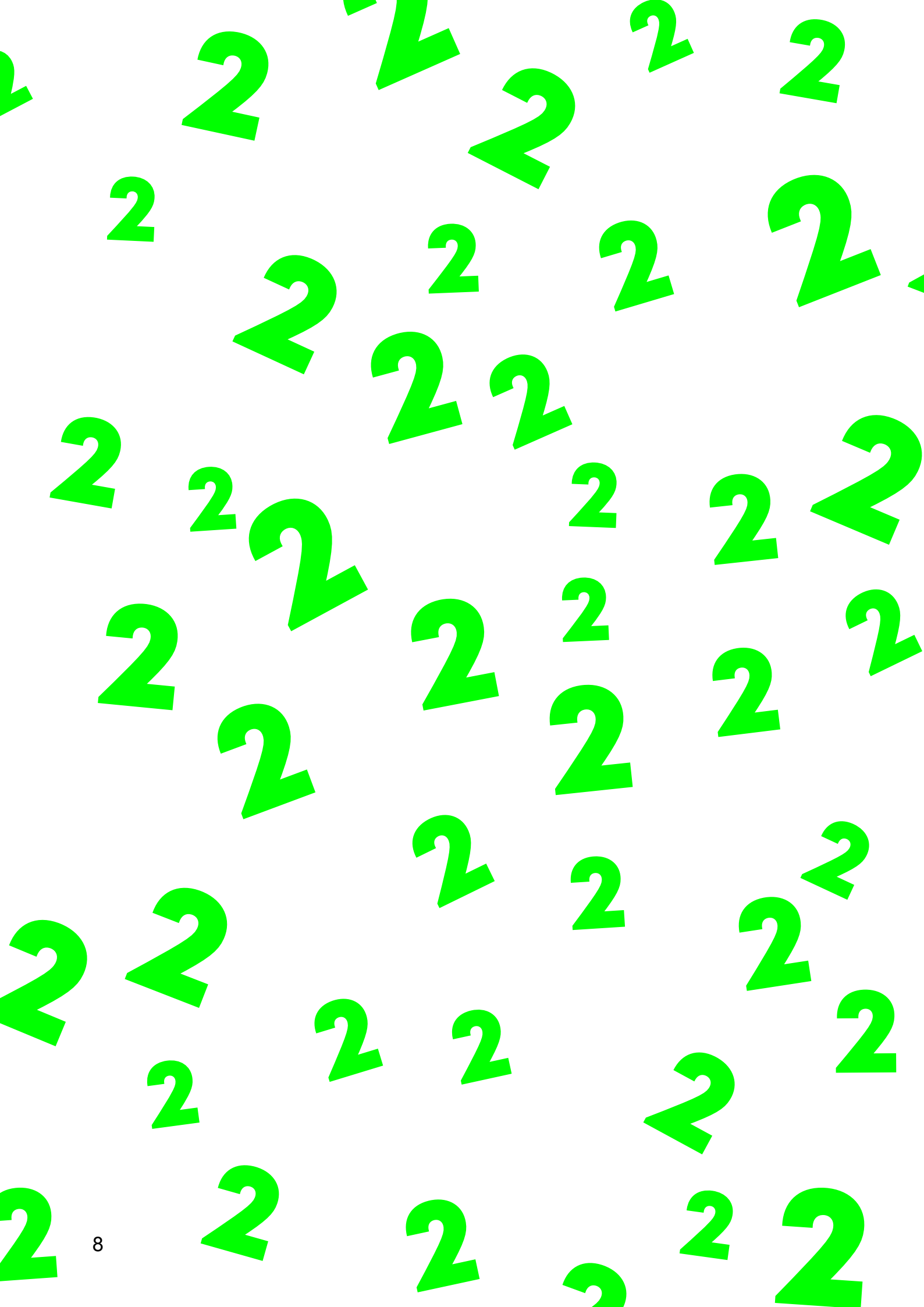
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66d7301b9084b18b95709f75/Keeping_children_safe_in_education_2024.pdf



For Department for Education guidance on statutory Relationships and Sex Education (primary and secondary)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>





2

The Prevalence of Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

2 The Prevalence of Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment

Child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools is not a new issue, but it gained unprecedented attention in 2021. The tragic case of Sarah Everard—who was kidnapped and murdered by Wayne Couzens, a serving MET police officer, sparked national outrage and widespread conversations about gender-based violence. The Everyone's Invited platform, an online space for victims of sexual violence and harassment in UK schools and universities to share anonymous accounts, exploded with testimonies from tens of thousands of young people. As the spotlight turned towards schools, the Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to conduct an urgent review into the extent of the problem.

Whilst the findings were unsurprising to many, they were deeply disturbing. Ofsted discovered that:

- **Child-on-child sexual abuse is widespread in schools** and considered normal by young people.
- **Sexual harassment is pervasive** in all contexts.
- **Unsolicited nudes are common**, with 90% of girls and 50% of boys reporting being sent them 'a lot' or 'sometimes.'
- **Misogynistic attitudes are prevalent**, with 92% of girls and 74% of boys witnessing sexist name-calling 'a lot' or 'sometimes.'
- **Teachers often underestimate the problem** and fail to prevent or address it effectively.
- **Teachers lack confidence** in delivering Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) content related to sexual harassment and sexual violence, including online.
- **The RSE curriculum is failing** to equip students with the knowledge and skills needed to make informed choices.
- **Schools and safeguarding partners are not aligned** and lack a full understanding of the extent and significance of sexual harassment in schools and their local areas.

Who Can Be a Victim?

Anyone can be a victim of sexual violence and sexual harassment, regardless of age, gender, sexuality, race, or class.

According to Rape Crisis England and Wales:



1 in 4 women

have been sexually assaulted since the age of 16.



1 in 6 children

have been sexually abused.



1 in 18 men

have been sexually assaulted since the age of 16.

The highest ever number of rapes recorded within a 12-month period was documented in the year ending September 2022, with **70,633 cases** reported to the police. During this period, charges were brought in just **2,616 rape cases**.



798,000 women

(or 1 in 30) are raped or sexually assaulted every year.



98% of adults prosecuted

for sexual offences are men.

While any student could potentially be a victim or perpetrator, it is crucial to understand patterns of behaviour. As highlighted in Keeping Children Safe in Education (2024):

“Whilst any report of sexual violence or sexual harassment should be taken seriously, staff should be aware it is more likely girls will be the victims of sexual violence and sexual harassment, and more likely it will be perpetrated by boys. Children with disabilities are also three times more likely to be abused than their peers” (p.112).

Child sexual abuse and exploitation have increased by over **400%** between 2013 and 2022 (National Police Chiefs’ Council, 2023). Additionally, an average of **one rape occurs on school premises every school day** (Bates, 2022).

Research from the National Police Chiefs’ Council (2023) reveals a deeply troubling trend: children now account for **55.6% of all perpetrators of child sexual abuse**, with victims averaging **13 years old** and perpetrators averaging **15 years old**.

Everyone's Invited - testimonies from the UK

"When I was seven, the boys at my primary school would come into the girls bathroom and show me their private areas multiple times and force me to look at them. It was really bad because I didn't get a choice and I thought it was normal... When I was 9, my guy friends at my primary school would sexualise me nearly every sentence and "joke" about doing sexual things to me and me doing sexual things to other people. They would talk about sexual stuff every day and exposed me to everything. They made me watch sexual content as well."

"... there were a group of boys . they were harassing me and my friends when we were sat outside on the bench . one of the boys sat on me and the other one went behind the bench and put his hand down my bra . the one sat on me bounced and made noises. i told them to get off and tried to push them off but he was really big . i broke down crying after it . my boy best friend at the time witnessed it all from across the patio thing and he did nothign .his friends insulted me saying i was a slag instead of asking me if i was okay . i did tell him to get off i made myself reallt clear and i was struggling to push him off but those boys told everyone i asked him to do that . they punished the boy who put his hand down by putting him in the same detention i was".

"I was abused for about 2-2.5 years whilst at this secondary school. Some students were allowed into some of the classrooms during break and lunch without supervision which is how he got away with it for the most part. It started there and escalated to walking home through the woods next to the school and eventually him showing up outside school when he left to go to college and i was still there."

"I was pushed against the wall he grabbed my boobs and continued to verbally abuse me. I still see him every day."

"I was throttled in year 8 by a boy in my year because I refused to let him touch under my skirt in drama class"

“

“the boys in our year started the traditional of “ass slap [date omitted to preserve anonymity]” this especially involved them seeing how many girls bums they could grab/slap/touch within the month. We complained so much to teachers but because their was “no proof” and “it was in a crowded corridor”. It wasn’t until one boy in our year pulled a jumper over a girls head and slapped her that they started doing something. This lasted until [date omitted to preserve anonymity]. And instead of calling out the group of boys we’d named they took out every boy in our year which didn’t help the problem at all.”

“...We had a gaggle of wealthy boys who created their own boys club. It was a game to them of how many girls they could tick off sexually assaulting without getting caught. I was an outside student and I didn’t know of any of this so when I was sexually assaulted under the guise of what I thought was initially a study session it completely wiped out my sense of safety, security, trust and identity. My academics plummeted and yet my Guidance teacher suggested I was making a big deal out of nothing, that it was boys being boys...”

”

“

“Me and my ‘friend’ were in a dance class. We had to do this move where you pull someone through your legs and she volunteered to be pulled up. As she was coming through, she decided to touch me where she was not welcome to do so. I told her that she couldn’t do that and she denied ever doing it. She did it another few times and I didn’t say anything, because I was too scared. At lunch, the same day, I went to tell a teacher, however they completely dismissed my claims, as we were both girls and ‘it wouldn’t be possible’. She went without any punishment.”

Portsmouth **student** quotes...

“It is really common, in my experience. Female students have been catcalled, particularly while wearing PE kit, groped in crowded areas, and in rare cases sexually assaulted by their partner within a toxic or coercive relationship.”

Portsmouth **teacher** quotes...

“It was eye opening, as an adult working in a school, to realise how much we are in danger of normalising harmful sexual behaviour due to our own school experiences.”



3

Preventing Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Through a Whole-School Approach

3 Preventing Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment Through a Whole-School Approach

Schools are well-versed in their safeguarding responsibilities, and existing guidance on child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment has helped them develop increasingly robust responses to incidents. However, while the need for schools to prioritise prevention is widely recognised, the methodology for achieving this remains unclear.

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is one of the most powerful tools for preventing child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment. However, its impact is greatest when it is embedded within a comprehensive whole-school approach.

Portsmouth **student** quotes...



“Students and teachers are aware of these issues, and awareness is raised through assemblies in a very general and non-specific manner. However, everything that is done is reactive and fades fast after an incident fades in the school’s memory. While many are passionate about solving these issues, the prevalent attitude among students is that the issue is minimal, or not present in their school, and even if it exists there’s nothing they can do if they personally aren’t actively participating in or witnessing sexual harassment/violence.”

The following pillars can guide you in planning and embedding your school's commitment to preventing sexual violence and sexual harassment:

**Prioritise
Prevention**

**Commit to
Lasting Change**

**Commit to a
Shared Philosophy**

1. Prioritise Prevention



Consistent and clear communication.

Lead from the top and clearly communicate your school's unambiguous commitment to prevention.



Ensure all staff see active prevention as their duty.

Make it clear that everyone has a role to play in creating a safe and respectful environment.



Strategically align your efforts.

Link your commitment to preventing sexual harassment of students with efforts to prevent harassment of staff. Refer to the Workers Amendment (2024) to the Equality Act (2010).



Prioritise curriculum time for RSE and character education.

Embed Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) as a core part of the curriculum and integrate it with character education.



Invest in staff training.

Provide regular, whole-staff training, including for governors (e.g. on combatting misogyny and sexual harassment). Supplement your RSE curriculum with specialist RSE training and external speakers.



Support your RSE lead.

Allocate sufficient time, status, and remuneration commensurate with this whole-school role.

2. Commit to lasting change



Regularly gather data to evaluate initiatives.

Use ongoing data collection to measure the effectiveness of your preventative strategies and make evidence-based adjustments.



Increase your data monitoring efforts.

Go beyond recording incidents by actively monitoring student attitudes and behaviours to gain a deeper understanding of underlying issues.



Evaluate how data is recorded and trends are monitored.

Assess your current systems for recording incidents and tracking trends to identify areas for improvement.



Acknowledge problems within your school.

Be transparent about the challenges faced and use this as a foundation for improvement.



Adopt a multi-agency approach.

Collaborate with local safeguarding partners to monitor regional trends, share resources, and strengthen your school's response.



Value student voice.

Actively involve students in shaping your strategic responses, ensuring their perspectives are heard and integrated into your initiatives.

3. Commit to a shared philosophy



Embed this commitment in your school values and strategic aims.

Make the prevention of sexual violence and sexual harassment a core part of your school's mission and long-term objectives.



Articulate and enforce a zero-tolerance approach.

Clearly communicate and consistently uphold a zero-tolerance stance on sexual violence and sexual harassment.



Combine zero tolerance with restorative approaches.

Balance firm accountability with restorative practices to promote learning, healing, and positive behaviour change.



Ensure all staff understand and reinforce the same approach.

Provide clear guidance and training so that every staff member can model and support the school's philosophy.



Model and promote gender equity.

Encourage staff to demonstrate gender equity in their actions, language, and expectations, setting a positive example for students.



Commit to Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI).

Integrate EDI principles throughout all aspects of school life, from policies to everyday practices.



Engage parents and carers.

Involve families in your efforts through consultations, information evenings, and regular updates in newsletters to foster a collaborative approach.

Rape Culture

'Rape culture' refers to societal attitudes, norms, and behaviours that normalise, trivialise, or even glamorise sexual violence. To take a preventative approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment in schools, it is vital that all members of the school community are equipped to recognise and actively challenge instances of rape culture. Failing to address these behaviours allows harmful attitudes to persist and may contribute to an unsafe environment.

Consider the following examples of rape culture in school settings:


- A teacher dismisses sexual harassment by saying, "boys will be boys."
- In an RSE lesson, a teacher warns girls against gaining a "reputation" for sleeping around, reinforcing double standards.
- During a discussion about rape, a student blames the victim for being drunk, and this comment goes unchallenged.
- A male student complains about being groped by a female peer, and this is dismissed as "funny."
- A student group chat ranks girls from being "rapeable" to "unrapeable."
- Girls' skirt lengths are criticised for being a "distraction" to boys and male staff, implicitly placing the onus on girls to regulate male behaviour.
- A video allegedly showing a female student performing oral sex on a male peer circulates among students. Some staff are overheard discussing what 'she' did rather than addressing the serious breach of consent and the harm caused to the victim(s).


By identifying and confronting examples like these, schools can begin to dismantle rape culture. This involves training staff to challenge harmful comments, fostering a culture of mutual respect among students, and embedding principles of equity and consent throughout school policies, curricula, and daily interactions. Proactive education, combined with a zero-tolerance approach to sexual harassment, is essential to creating an environment where every student feels safe, valued, and empowered.


Case Study: School uniform


School X is a traditional co-educational school that has always placed a strong emphasis on the importance of school uniform and its reputation. However, female students reported that the way uniform rules were enforced made them feel sexualised and shamed. Examples included comments about girls’ modesty, public scrutiny of skirt lengths, and remarks suggesting they were a distraction to male students and staff.

In response, the school implemented the following changes:

- 

Inclusive uniform options.
‘Girl’ and ‘boy’ uniforms were replaced with ‘skirt’ and ‘trouser’ options, available to all students regardless of gender.
- 

Staff training.
All staff received training on rape culture and misogyny to improve their awareness and sensitivity.
- 

Guidance for staff.
Staff were provided with crib sheets detailing how to address uniform issues appropriately and phrases to avoid.
- 

Student consultation.
Students were actively consulted throughout the process to ensure their voices were heard and their concerns addressed.

Combining Zero Tolerance with Restorative Approaches

The Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) 2024 guidance states that schools and colleges should adopt a clear zero-tolerance approach to sexual violence and sexual harassment, emphasising that such behaviour is never acceptable and will not be tolerated.

A zero-tolerance approach involves both proactive and reactive strategies:

Proactive measures:

All staff are fully trained and vigilant in identifying and addressing sexual abuse and sexual harassment.

All students are made aware of the school's expectations and the law, with consistent reinforcement of these messages.



Reactive measures:

Incidents are taken seriously and dealt with promptly.

Appropriate punitive measures are applied within the school.

Perpetrators are kept away from victims.

Referrals are made to relevant agencies, including the police when a crime has occurred.



Framing Zero Tolerance

In the school context, zero tolerance should focus on condemning the behaviour rather than the individual. When appropriate, a restorative approach can complement this by meaningfully addressing and changing harmful attitudes and behaviours.

At a whole-school level, a restorative culture promotes:

- Consent, growth, and healthy relationships.
- Agency and accountability.
- Empowerment.

When used alongside zero tolerance, restorative practices can help prevent sexual violence and harassment between children. Instead of condemning a child outright for a mistake, this approach provides a high-challenge, high-support framework for learning, rebuilding trust, and fostering personal growth.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Although limited academic research exists on restorative practices in this specific context, insights from adult cases are promising. The UK Ministry of Justice reported that restorative approaches in cases of domestic violence reduced reoffending rates by 14%.

(Source: UK Parliament - Restorative Justice, 2016-2017).

Basic Principles of Restorative Practice in Schools

**Empowering students:**

Students are supported to find meaningful resolutions to conflicts or harm.

**Accountability:**

Students are supported to find meaningful resolutions to conflicts or harm.

**Structured mediation:**

After individual meetings, restorative methods guide mediation to find a constructive way forward.

**Non-judgemental facilitation:**

The facilitator remains impartial, ensuring a safe and respectful environment for all parties.

**Informed consent:**

All participants, including the victim and perpetrator, must provide their consent to engage in the restorative process.

Case Study: Combining zero tolerance with a restorative approach

School X has successfully embedded restorative practices throughout its culture, using them to address harmful sexual behaviour in ways that promote growth and meaningful change. This approach ensures that respectful, shame-free language is used with both victims and perpetrators. While consequences are still applied, children are supported in understanding the impact of their behaviour and taking responsibility for their actions.

Case in Point:

Child X, a Year 10 boy, exhibited harmful behaviours, including using overly sexualised language and inappropriately touching other students and staff.

The School's Response:

1. Initial Meeting and Support Planning:

- A meeting was held with Child X and his parents to discuss the concerning behaviours and their impact on others.
- Desired behavioural changes were outlined, and additional support was introduced to help Child X manage impulsive tendencies, including collaboration with external agencies.

2. Risk Management Plan:

- In partnership with Child X and his family, a risk management plan was developed, incorporating both proactive and reactive strategies.
- The plan outlined clear expectations, including behaviours that would not be tolerated and their corresponding consequences.
- Staff were briefed on the plan and given guidance on daily strategies to support Child X.

3. Environmental Adjustments:

- Group and environment changes were implemented to ensure Child X was distanced from all identified victims.
- Meetings were held with the victims and their families to provide reassurance and support.

4. Restorative Conversation:

- Both Child X and the victim were offered the opportunity to participate in a supervised restorative conversation, to which they both consented.
- Each party was asked what they hoped to achieve from the process:
 - Child X expressed a desire to make amends.
 - The victim expressed a wish to move forward and leave the incident behind.
- A restorative conversation was facilitated by trained staff:
 - Child X took responsibility for his actions, expressed regret, and acknowledged the harm caused.
 - The victim shared the emotional impact of Child X's behaviour.
 - Child X committed to making positive changes moving forward.

Outcome:

There were no repeat incidents of harmful sexual behaviour from Child X.
Both students were able to move forward and fully re-engage in school life.

For further definitions and tips for how to use restorative practice in schools see:

<https://www.portsmouthscp.org.uk/7-information-for-professionals-and-volunteers/7-15-restorative-practice/>



Case Study: Challenging inappropriate behaviours

School X identified a persistent issue with misogynistic “banter” and took several proactive steps to address it by implementing the following measures:



1. Staff Training:

Regular whole-staff training sessions on misogyny were provided to raise awareness and challenge harmful behaviours.



2. Reflection on Language Use:

Staff were encouraged to reflect on their own language and acknowledge the harmful impact of phrases like “boys will be boys.”



3. Addressing Casual Harassment:

Staff were instructed to remain vigilant and avoid downplaying or normalising abusive behaviours, especially by dismissing casual harassment or misogynistic comments as “just banter” or “part of growing up.”



4. Educational Initiatives for Students:

Assemblies, tutor time, and Relationships, Sex, and Health Education (RSHE) lessons were used to educate students on what constitutes sexual harassment, the impact it can have, and the school’s stance on such behaviour.



5. Reinforcement through Visual Cues:

The messaging from lessons was reinforced with posters and consistent language used by all staff members.



6. Combining Approaches:

The school adopted a combined zero tolerance and restorative approach to ensure that harmful behaviours were addressed firmly while fostering personal responsibility and growth.



7. Listening to Students:

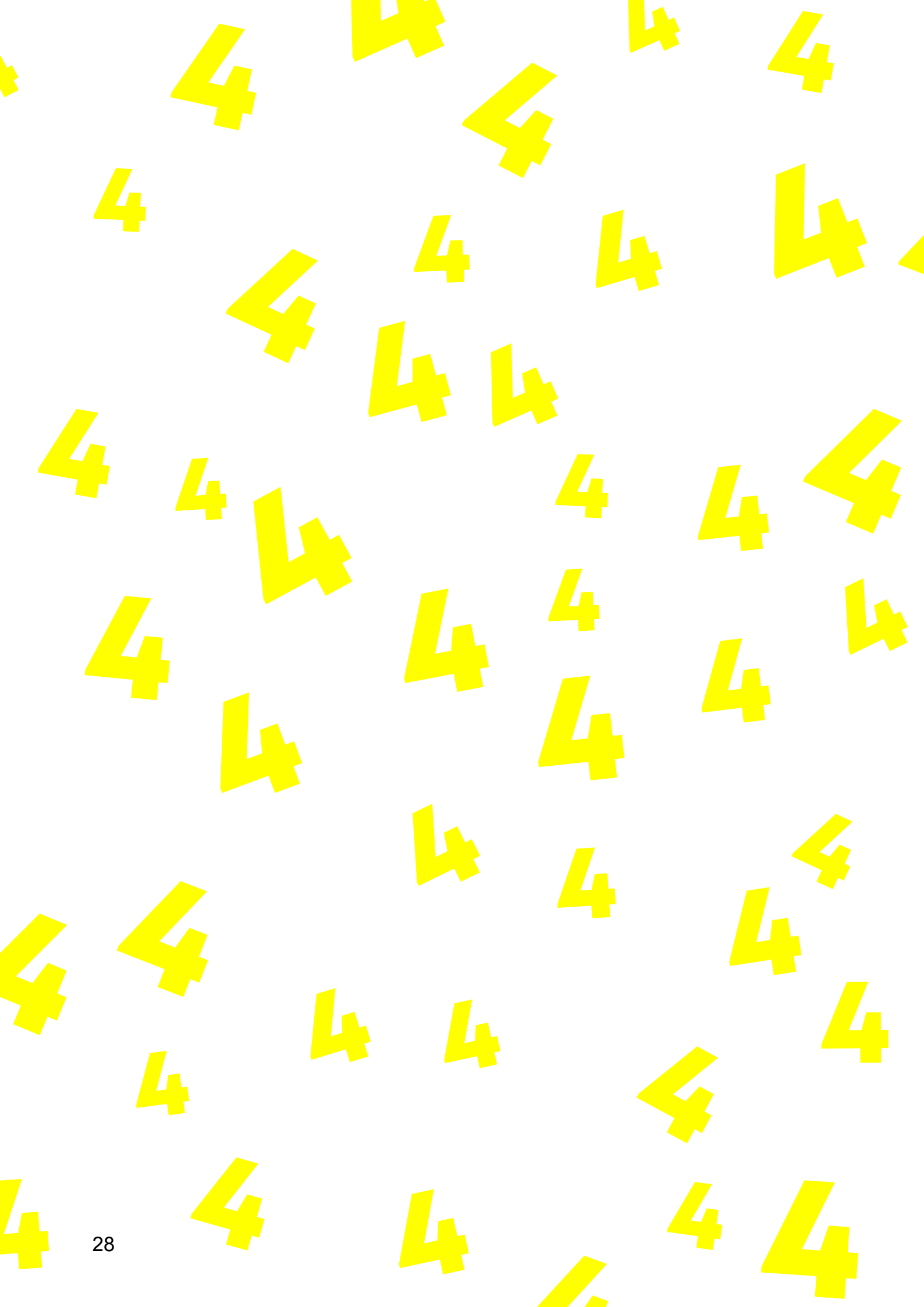
The school engaged with students of all genders to better understand how they felt about the issue, the underlying causes of these behaviours, and how the school could be most effective in addressing them.

Portsmouth **teacher** quotes...

“We recently had some great training on sexual abuse in schools and colleges but only the RSE teachers had the training. There is so much we want to implement but none of our senior leaders were there. I really think every member of staff needs this and that the changes should be driven from the top down.”

”

engendering
change



4

Preventing Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment through Relationships and Sex Education

4 Preventing Child-on-Child Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment through Relationships and Sex Education

RSE became a statutory subject in England in September 2020. The guidance compels all schools to educate their students on how to recognise and report abuse. From discussions about boundaries at a primary level, to deeper examinations of consent at secondary, the imperative to deliver RSE to combat abuse is clear.

The Evidence

While previous studies on the efficacy of RSE have primarily focused on sexual health outcomes, more recent research has highlighted its positive impact on:

- Reducing instances of abuse
- Challenging and reducing rape culture
- Increasing the reporting of abuse
- Promoting gender equity and healthy relationships

The evidence

- In their review of three decades of RSE in schools, Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) found a significant impact on reducing psychological, sexual and physical abuse perpetration. They also found that RSE is impactful in reducing attitudes which contribute to rape culture like victim blaming and acceptance of sexual coercion and harassment.
- A Cochrane review (Walsh, 2015) found that ‘children who are taught about preventing sexual abuse at school are more likely to tell an adult if they had, or were actually experiencing sexual abuse’ (14 in 100, compared with 4 in 1000).
- UNESCO (2018) cites potential effects of RSE in contributing to changes beyond health outcomes, including ‘increasing gender equitable norms’ and ‘building stronger and healthier relationships’.

In addition to a whole school approach, RSE provides an ongoing opportunity for students to acquire the knowledge, skills and self-awareness to be part of the solution to sexual violence and harassment between children. This is implicit in all RSE topics but also taught explicitly through the themes of:

- Setting and respecting boundaries
- Healthy/ unhealthy relationships
- Online interactions
- Narratives from pornography
- Misogyny
- Sexual abuse, harassment and violence
- Understanding sexual consent
- Sexual pleasure and fulfilment
- Communication
- Self-awareness
- Authenticity and character

Given the sensitive nature of these topics, it is essential for schools to publish their schemes of work in advance for parents and, as stipulated in the statutory guidance, to involve parents in the development of the RSE policy.

For a comprehensive review of the evidence to support the efficacy of RSE

<https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/RSE%20The%20Evidence%20-%20SEF%202022.pdf>



Parental Right To Withdraw

Parents do not have the right to withdraw their child from Relationships Education at either the primary or secondary level. However, they do have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of the Sex Education taught as part of the RSE programme, excluding content covered by the statutory Science curriculum. This right to withdraw remains until three terms before the child turns 16. After this point, if the child wishes to receive Sex Education, the school must arrange to provide it, including any necessary catch-up material.

It is advisable to include clear processes in the RSE Policy regarding parental requests for withdrawal. For example, a school may state that:

- Any request for withdrawal should be made in writing to the Head.
- Before granting the request, the Head will discuss the request with parents and, as appropriate, with their child to ensure that their wishes are understood and to clarify the nature and purpose of the curriculum.
- Right to withdraw is based on opt-out, rather than opt in and that an outline of the content will be published at the beginning of the academic year, rather than ahead of each RSE module.

In some situations, particular consideration may be required for a student's specific needs, such as those arising from trauma, special educational needs, or disability. Once discussions have taken place, and except in exceptional circumstances, the school should respect the parents' request to withdraw the child from sex education up to and until three terms before the child turns 16.

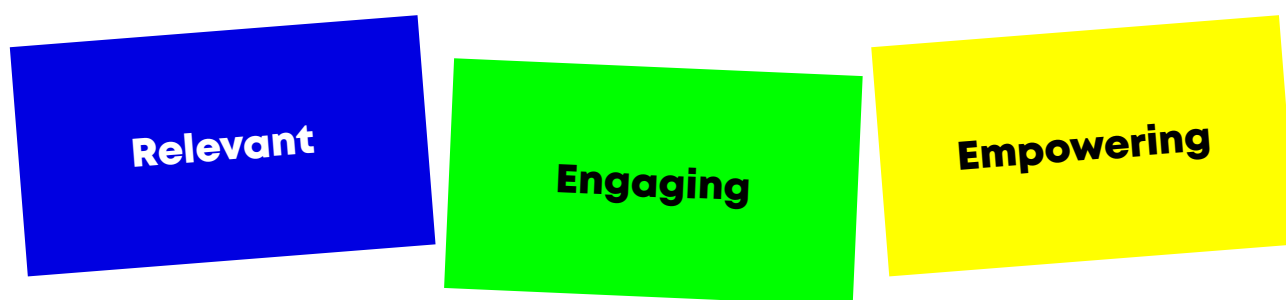
If a child is withdrawn from sex education, it is likely to be for only a small part of the lesson, as much of the RSE content is delivered within the Science curriculum or through Relationships and Health Education. During such periods of withdrawal, the student should receive purposeful education that aligns with their learning needs.

A Trauma-Informed Approach to RSE

When delivering lessons on sexual violence, it is crucial to adopt a trauma-informed approach. This requires careful planning and clear communication, recognising that some students may have experienced sexual abuse or trauma. To minimise the risk of retraumatising students, it is essential to fully inform them of the lesson content in advance and offer an opt-out if they feel this is necessary.

In addition, alternative support should be offered to students who may feel uneasy about the content but still wish to engage with the learning. It is also vital to highlight support services, both within the school and in the wider community during these lessons. Teachers must be prepared to handle any disclosures sensitively and in accordance with safeguarding protocols.

The pillars of effective RSE to combat child-on-child sexual violence and sexual harassment



Relevant

It is essential that RSE directly meets the needs of students and that they can clearly see the relevance of the curriculum to themselves.

Within every classroom there will be a vast range of attitudes, experiences and identities and lessons need to be planned and delivered with this in mind. When learning about sexual violence and consent, students should be given opportunities to reflect on what this means for them personally.

Case Study: Inclusive RSE

School X has undertaken a Diversity and Inclusion review of their RSE curriculum. Knowing that RSE has historically focused on male sexual pleasure and heterosexual sex and relationships, they have sought to identify and remedy where there are opportunities to embed a commitment to equality in the curriculum and ensure that no student feels excluded.

Example 1: Ensuring that diversity is reflected in case studies and examples.

When using popular TV shows to explore realistic, positive depictions of sexual consent they use diverse examples. Students are shown the clips and then discuss if they think the relationships seem healthy/ unhealthy. Can they see respect, communication and consent featured in each?

- Clip 1 (heterosexual couple): BBC series Normal People (also a book by Sally Rooney). Episode 2: 2.40 - 6.38.

WARNING – Features nudity and sexual content – please give opt out.

- Clip 2 (heterosexual couple, one of them disabled): Netflix series Sex Education. Season 3 Episode 4.
- Clip 3 (same sex female, mixed race couple): Netflix series Heartstopper. Season 1, Episode 3.

Example 2: Using Open Discussions to Explore the Diversity and Complexity of Human Relationships and Identities.

In exploring statistics on sexual violence, the data were broken down by gender and sexuality. Students were encouraged to engage in reflective discussions, with the teacher gently challenging assumptions and prompting deeper thinking. For example:

Who can be a victim of sexual violence or sexual harassment?

Discussions emphasised that anyone, regardless of sex, age, gender, race, or religion, can be a victim, whether in person or online. The conversation expanded to include countries where modest dress is customary, yet sexual violence remains just as prevalent. This led to a discussion on victim blaming, such as the question of what a rape victim was wearing. The discussion then shifted to include male victims of sexual violence and extended into the topic of sexual violence in intimate relationships, regardless of sexuality. The teacher reinforced key messages: that sexual violence is the fault of the perpetrator, not the victim, and provided information on how to access support and understand consent.



Who can be a perpetrator of rape?

Students recalled that under UK law, rape can only be committed by someone with a penis. This led to a thought-provoking discussion about pre- and post-operative trans women and sexual violence in prisons. Some students challenged the idea that only men can commit rape, arguing that such a view is sexist towards men. Others countered that the sentencing for sexual assault carries the same maximum term, regardless of the perpetrator's gender. Some students also pointed out the potential long-term effects of other forms of sexual assault.



It is essential that teachers do not rely on assumptions when planning the RSE curriculum. It is also important to recognise that particular trends and patterns can emerge within schools and year groups. Regular engagement with students will ensure that their rapidly evolving needs are met more effectively.

Case Study: Gathering data to meet student need

School X uses a combination of anonymous student surveys and working groups to ensure that their Relationships, Sex and Health Education directly meets the needs of their students. Each year, they use both approaches to assess their students' behaviours and attitudes to things like sexual consent, sexual violence, pornography and LGBTQ issues. They use this data to:

- Assess student need
- Tailor the RSHE curriculum to directly meet student need
- Monitor trends
- Assess the efficacy of initiatives
- Strategically plan interventions
- Engage students in planning and evaluating the curriculum
- Engage with parents and help them to understand why and when they deliver each topic

The RSHE lead and relevant staff are given time to embed the findings in their strategy for the year ahead.

Portsmouth **student** quotes...

“Our school completes regular surveys with us and then really talks through the results. This makes us feel listened to and helps us to bring about changes which make sure everyone can keep themselves and others safe.”

”

Engaging

Most young people are naturally curious about sex and relationships, and when lessons are planned and delivered effectively, they find them both positive and impactful.

However, some teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching RSE, and this reticence can create a barrier to delivering engaging and effective lessons. High-quality, empowering training can help overcome this challenge, but staff should not be forced to deliver content they are uncomfortable with. Ensuring that teachers feel confident and enthusiastic is essential for creating an environment where students can truly engage with the material.

In every school, there will be many teachers interested in delivering RSE. If RSE is prioritised and allocated sufficient time in the timetabled curriculum, a team of specialist teachers can be established. When teachers are passionate about teaching the subject, it enhances students' learning experience.

Case Study: Engaging lessons

When School X went from a one week timetable to a two week timetable, they included 1 hour PSHE lessons every fortnight for every year group. Previously, the programme had been delivered by tutors in shorter sessions.

Ahead of this change, staff were asked for expressions of interest to teach PSHE and a group of 6 existing staff were timetabled to teach PSHE in addition to their academic subject. They were given specialist training and the subject lead was given time to plan the new curriculum which was divided into the themes of Relationships, Life Skills and Health & Wellbeing across all year groups.

The specialist team were all confident in delivering lessons on consent and sexual violence and a consistent philosophy and method was established.

Student satisfaction increased drastically, with students' only complaint being that they wanted the lessons every week.

Case Study: Engaging Boys

In discussions on misogyny and combatting sexual violence, it can sometimes be the case that boys become defensive or dismissive. Instead of winning them over, schools may unintentionally further entrench these attitudes, thus exacerbating the problem.

School X encountered this challenge and developed the following strategic response:

- They hosted open discussions with boys, where they listened to their concerns and sought their advice on how to make the content as engaging and relevant as possible.
- Male staff took leadership in delivering a programme of assemblies, on topics such as mental health, friendship, fatherhood, being in relationships, and how to be an ally to women.
- They increased their efforts to celebrate positive examples of masculinity, such as through International Men's Day, and sought more opportunities to publicly reward and celebrate male students, particularly for displaying good character.
- The school strengthened its mentorship programme, pairing male teachers with boys and older boys with younger boys.

- When addressing issues like sexual violence, they began by acknowledging that not all men are perpetrators, but emphasised that all men can be part of the solution.
- In discussing online misogyny, they avoided focusing solely on figures like Andrew Tate. Instead, they explored broader themes, acknowledging why some students might find this content appealing, but encouraging them to reflect critically on the issues it raises.
- When they found some boys were preoccupied with the issue of false rape accusations, they acknowledged that while these cases can be devastating, they are rare and counterbalanced this by providing context:
 - A 2018 Channel 4 investigation found that the average adult man in England and Wales has a 0.0002% chance of being falsely accused of rape in a year.
 - A man in the UK is 230 times more likely to be raped himself than be falsely accused of rape (Factcheck, Channel 4, 2018).
 - There's a 1 in 70 chance a rapist will be charged (UK Home Office, 2021).
- Throughout these discussions, School X was explicit in its aim to empower all students, regardless of gender or sexuality. All topics were framed within the broader mission to help students have positive, fulfilling sex lives.
- Expert external speakers were engaged to deliver staff training and student talks, upskilling staff and reinforcing key messages.

Portsmouth **student** quotes...

“

“Sometimes we get the impression that all boys are evil. It seems like our teachers are making us out to always be the problem. Rather than changing anything, this just makes us feel bad and girls feel scared of us. Boys are more likely to listen if teachers help us understand how women feel without making us feel attacked. We need to be taught solutions, not that we’re the problem”

“Teenage boys need to be shown how to have a role in making a positive change. I feel like men’s mental health is a huge issue but completely ignored whereas we hear about women’s issues all the time. This makes boys switch off. We feel ignored and this makes it even more difficult for us to get help when we need it.”

”

“

“Girls are scared of boys. They hear about so much sexual violence and think it happens to everyone. They shrug it off.”

“Andrew Tate is a joke - so shocking and outrageous it’s laughable. I’ve never met anyone who takes him seriously. When teachers go on about him it makes the whole issue a joke and we switch off. It shows how much teachers don’t know what they’re talking about. It’s much better to speak about general issues than specific influencers. As soon as I hear Andrew Tate I just laugh. It makes a joke of lesson.”

”

Portsmouth **teacher** quotes

“I have responsibility for RSE in my school and the weight of responsibility is huge. I feel like I’ve got responsibility for so much but I am given very little time or training to make this role a success.”

”

Empowering

The knowledge and skills gained through Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) have the potential to positively influence students for the rest of their lives. When the curriculum is thoughtfully designed and lessons are engaging, young people can begin to develop a deeper understanding of their own character and values. They can learn to align their future sexual and romantic relationships with these principles, embracing their agency to ensure that this vital aspect of their lives enhances their wellbeing and that of their future partners.

With many young people receiving little or no RSE at home (Sex Education Forum, 2022), schools play a pivotal role in filling this gap. RSE lessons create safe, open opportunities for students to discuss sex and relationships—a vital step in fostering lifelong skills. These skills empower students to:

- Overcome embarrassment about discussing sex.
- Communicate their desires and express concerns when something does not feel right.
- Check in with their partners to ensure mutual comfort and consent.
- Discuss topics like pleasure in a healthy and open manner.
- Identify and respect personal and partner boundaries.
- Report incidents and seek help when needed.

By equipping students with these tools, RSE not only prepares them for positive future relationships but also contributes to their overall confidence, resilience, and sense of self-worth.

Empowerment for All

Across the country, many schools still adopt phallocentric (focused on the penis and male pleasure) and heteronormative (assuming everyone is heterosexual) approaches to RSE. Such approaches risk reinforcing gendered stereotypes, perpetuating rape culture, and undermining an empowered approach to sex and relationships.

Many teachers feel nervous about discussing female sexual pleasure but do not display the same nervousness when addressing topics such as erections, male ejaculation, or wet dreams. However, adopting an equitable approach to discussions on sexual pleasure is a crucial element in preventing sexual violence and harassment. Doing so ensures:

- Narratives from pornography are critically examined and challenged.
- Awareness of female sexual agency is raised, making it more likely to be respected.
- Girls understand that sex should feel pleasurable and are more likely to recognise and challenge painful or degrading sexual experiences.
- Boys learn that mutual pleasure is a fundamental part of a respectful and healthy sexual relationship, challenging harmful perceptions of dominance or entitlement.
- Gender stereotypes around sexuality (e.g., men as initiators and women as passive participants) are dismantled.
- LGBTQ+ perspectives and experiences are included, helping all students feel represented and validated in discussions about sex and relationships.
- Consent is framed within the context of mutual respect and shared enjoyment.
- Students are better equipped to identify coercive or manipulative behaviours in relationships.
- The importance of recognising that boys and men can also be victims of sexual violence is emphasised, reducing stigma and encouraging all victims to seek help.

By moving away from outdated, one-sided approaches and embracing a more inclusive, balanced, and open curriculum, schools can play a significant role in fostering healthier, more equitable attitudes toward sex and relationships.

Portsmouth **student** quotes...



"Adults in our school teach us about sex and relationships in a way that helps us understand what healthy relationships look and feel like."

"Our lessons on rape culture were interesting, relatable and informative and I feel like I have further knowledge about the subject, and the disgusting consequences of it."



"Understanding how sexual pleasure in women works made the lessons on consent make more sense. The no nonsense approach to the subject was both funny and enjoyable and helped us understand rape culture, what it is and how to avoid it."

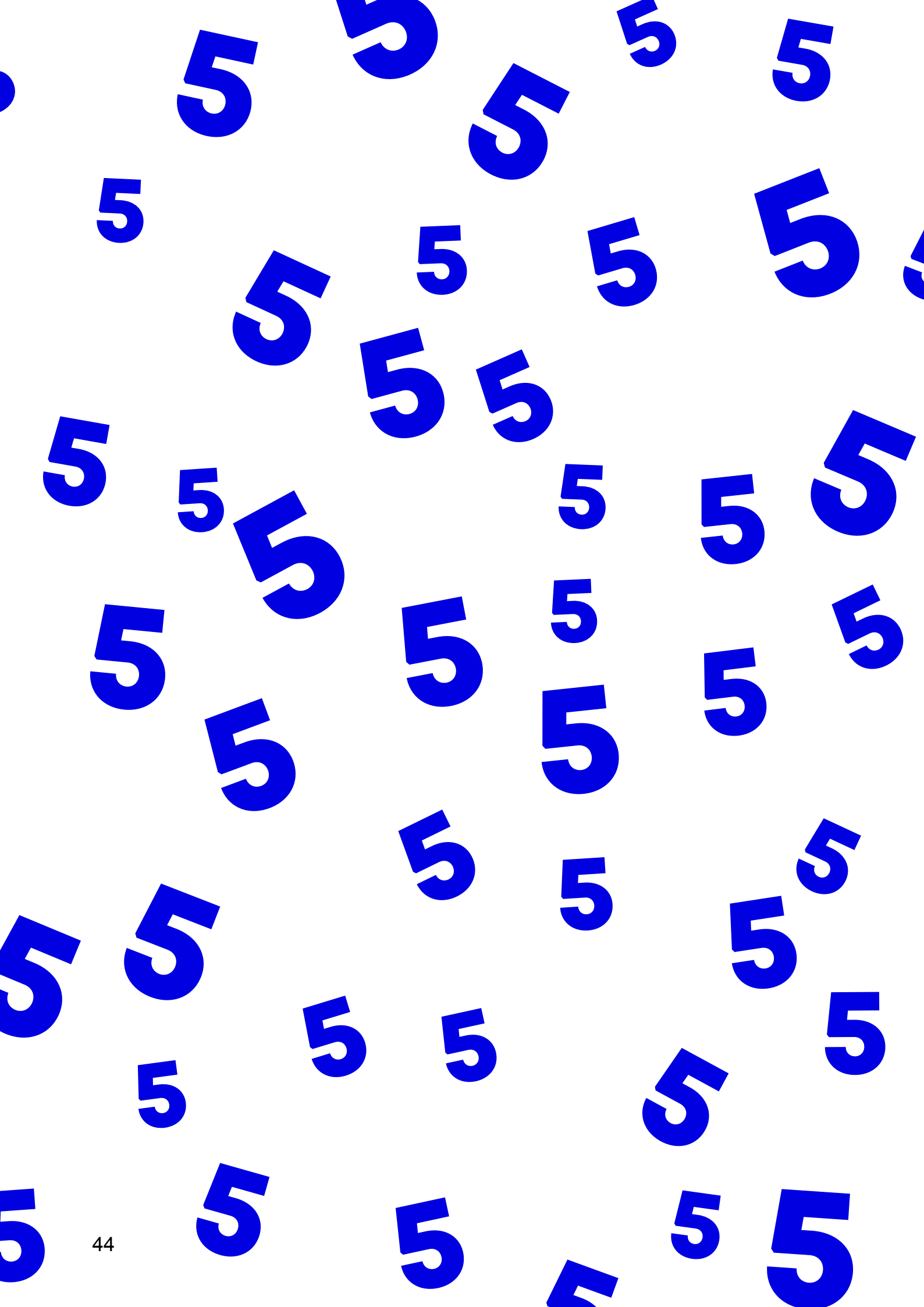
Portsmouth **teacher** quotes...



"We were lucky to have training in our school which really inspired our PSHE team, sharing best practice for RSE and focused on inclusive delivery for students of all genders and sexualities. This included practical strategies and led to a complete rewrite of our RSE, Personal Development Day and wider safeguarding curriculum. We now have a core team trained in RSE best practice who feel confident delivering this as a result."

"A wide range of resources used within our PSHE programme ensure best practice is embedded across our lessons and really helps staff and students see its value in the curriculum."

"At our school we believe it is important to recognise our responsibility as educators for teaching children about safe behaviour; this goes for perpetrators of harmful sexual behaviour too."



5

Teaching Toolkit

Ground rules

RSE lessons are best experienced by students and teachers when the boundaries and expectations are clearly communicated. Usual classroom rules apply but it is useful to verbalise and, when necessary, reaffirm how RSE lessons will work.

You may want to begin a new course, with a new class, by discussing this and coming up with an agreement together. This can be displayed in the room or photographed and used on the first slide of your teaching presentations.

When teachers enjoy teaching RSE and feel prepared and supported, the lessons can be great fun and there is always a place for laughter in the classroom. There is also a skill in reigning this in when necessary and covering serious topics like sexual violence with sensitivity.

Example ground rules:

- Nothing personal - do not ask personal questions or reveal personal sexual information.
- All other questions are welcome.
- It's okay to laugh but we will laugh with, rather than at each other.
- There will be an opportunity to ask anonymous questions.
- It is likely that you might want to continue some of the conversations on with your friends; just be mindful that this may not be appropriate around the school or in other lessons.
- We are likely to have a range of views and that is okay.

Students should be given advance notice of the topics that will be covered and have the choice to opt-out if necessary. They should be given time to consider this and the opportunity to discuss this discreetly with you. It is important to be vigilant to safeguarding concerns as such topics arise and to offer students support as necessary.

Embedding safeguarding in RSE

KICSE, 2024 is clear that “systems should be in place (and they should be well promoted, easily understood and easily accessible) for children to confidently report abuse, knowing their concerns will be treated seriously.”

Each September is an opportunity to revisit this through INSET for staff and PSHE for students.

Each year groups' PSHE course can begin by reaffirming the school's commitment to safeguarding, communicating the school's stance on sexual violence and sexual harassment between children and signposting support within and outside the school. Ahead of this, a poster naming relevant staff and where to find them should be updated, printed and displayed in every classroom. A review of local services should be conducted ahead of this, with the knowledge that these are often subject to change.

The following can be covered:

- Understanding safeguarding and the school's obligations.
- Definitions of harassment, abuse and rape.
- Discussions of how these can play out in person and online.
- The school's stance on sexual abuse, linked to the school's values.
- Signposting support within the school and how to access this.
- Discussions on limitations around confidentiality.
- Signposting local services (including locations and opening times) and young people's right to access these.
- Signposting other services and helplines.

Setting the Tone activity

At the beginning of every RSE topic, the following activity can be repeated.

Explain:

Sex can be a really important part of adult life. Good sex can contribute positively to a person's wellbeing, mental health, feelings of safety and security, pleasure, intimacy and so much more. Bad sex can do the very opposite – it can be to the detriment of a person's wellbeing and mental health, it can make people feel insecure and unsafe, it can be devoid of pleasure and intimacy.

Issue groups with blank A3 paper and ask them to draw a line down the middle and write 'good sex' on one side and 'bad sex' on the other.

Ask groups to discuss and add ideas around good and bad sex (features and impact). Encourage them to think about physical and mental considerations. Seek feedback and discuss as a whole class. This is a great ice-breaker and the students will begin to see that there is no taboo here. Invite discussions about what kinds of things might contribute to the positive and negative sides of sex and relationships. Encourage them to reflect on what they want for themselves and for their future partners. This should be led by the students with you acting as a facilitator, drawing out ideas like consent and respect and challenging where appropriate.

These open discussions about the positive aspects of relationships, will help them begin to understand what positive sex looks like. This can help to challenge narratives in porn, sexist attitudes and rape culture. The aim is to help them develop the skills of sexual literacy, self-reflection, and empathy with others.

Explain:

Of course good/ bad sex are subjective concepts. However, common agreement is often found on some of the features of 'good sex' like trust, orgasms, pleasure, fulfilment, happiness, intimacy, etc. and bad sex e.g. abusive, painful, lacking consent, no pleasure, etc. During this topic we will be investigating how to tip the scales in the right direction for you and your future partner(s).

Sexual literacy

Is one of the key skills you will acquire during this course.

Discuss:

- What are the practical sexual benefits of sexual literacy?
- How might an absence of sexual literacy be problematic?
- Will you challenge yourself to develop this skill as the course progresses?

Sexual literacy empowers us to access sexual health services, communicate about our needs and be more reflective about our sex lives. The absence of sexual literacy can be the source of many health and social hazards, including exposure to sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancies, secrecy around sexual abuse and violence, an obstacle to sexual pleasure and much more.

Keep the sheets of paper and refer back to these in future lessons. Alternatively, take a photo of the version you have created on the white board (from all their ideas) and embed this in your slides for future lessons.

Explain that the thinking we're starting in these lessons is part of an ongoing, lifelong challenge. Encourage pupils to continue to revisit these questions throughout their lives:

Are you: very confident/ somewhat confident/ unsure/ clueless?

1. How to tip the scales in the right direction
2. What your principles and values are in relation to sex and relationships
3. How you will embrace your sexual agency and the sexual agency of future partners
4. What your relationship red flags are
5. What flourishing looks like

Healthy Relationships

Often RSE lessons focus on risk management and helping students to understand what unhealthy relationships or violations of consent look like. This is important but will be most effective when students recognise and aspire to healthy, fulfilling relationships.

Task 1: Diamond 9

Discussion: Discuss: In what ways can romantic relationships be positive and/ or negative forces in our lives?

Issue pairs the 9 cards below. What features do you regard as most important? Use the Diamond 9 model to create a hierarchy of the cards. Add three of your own.



Task 2: Beginning relationships

Look at the case study cards below.

Ask groups of 3 or 4 to discuss:

Where have things gone well and why? Which scenarios have gone badly? What advice would you give?

As a whole class, ask students to physically place themselves along a wall according to how healthy they feel each response is. This will form a continuum. Ask them to explain their positions.

Case Study 1

Mo and Louis met in their first week of college. They quickly became friends and began meeting for coffee at break times. Mo realised he really liked Louis but wasn't sure if he felt the same. He thought Louis might be flirting with him, but he was finding it

difficult to read the signs. Eventually he asked Louis if he'd like to meet outside of college. Louis seemed keen and they decided to go for a walk. When they were on the walk the conversation was flowing easily and Mo felt confident that Louis might fancy him. He asked Louis if he was in a relationship and they both made it clear that they were single. At the end of the walk Mo asked if he'd like to go out on a date. Louis said he'd love to and after several dates Mo asked Louis to be his boyfriend. He agreed.

Case Study 2

When James joined Sarah's school in year 9, she knew she fancied him straight away. They sat next to each other in Maths and over time, Sarah felt a connection building. Sarah told all her friends about this and asked one of them to let James know she fancied him. Her friends told her that James just seemed embarrassed and awkward, so Sarah sent him a SnapChat telling him she liked him. James still didn't respond. Eventually, Sarah found out that James was going out with one of her friends, so she started spreading rumours about them cheating on each other. In Maths she started calling him 'gay' and laughing at him. Sarah has hated James ever since.

Case Study 3

Rehan and Amelia go to different schools. They have mutual friends but have never met in person. They have followed each other on Instagram and started chatting. Over time, it's clear that they both like each other (more than friends) and they decide to meet in person. The meeting makes them realise there's definitely something there. They keep chatting online and meeting up and eventually Amelia asks if they should make their relationship official. Rehan explains that he wants to take things slowly. Amelia is disappointed but accepts his decision. They continue as they are for a few weeks but begin to drift apart. They haven't chatted since.

Case Study 4

Eoin and Mai had known each other since junior school. They had never been close friends but by the time they were 16, Eoin started developing feelings for Mai. One day, Eoin told Mai he fancied her in front of everyone. Mai was clearly embarrassed and didn't know what to say. Everyone else seemed to find it funny when Eoin started stroking her leg and speaking in a sexual way about her. Later that evening Eoin surprised Mai by turning up at her house and telling her he wanted to go out with her. Mai explained that she liked him but did not want to go out with him. They agreed to just be friends but when Eoin went home, he sent her lots of messages telling her she was beautiful and begging her to go out with him.

Red flags:

Ask groups of 3 or 4 to discuss:

Look at the case study cards.

What's going on here? Is this a problem? What advice would you give?

Case Study 1

You have been with your partner for several months. You get on really well and want to spend as much time with them as possible. Gradually, you spend less time with your friends but when your best friend's birthday comes along, you're really looking forward to their party. Leading up to this, your partner tells you that they don't trust your best friend and asks you not to go. You have a big argument about this, and your partner gives you an ultimatum: choose them or your best friend.

Case Study 2

You and your partner are in love. When things are going well it's great, but you find that you keep arguing and the arguments are becoming more frequent and intense. Your partner gets very jealous when you speak to other people and keeps accusing you of cheating on them (you're not). If you don't respond to their messages immediately, they become paranoid. No matter how much you try to reassure them, these arguments keep happening and it's making you very stressed.

Case Study 3

Your partner is very critical of you. You're sure they love you, but they keep making negative comments about your appearance and personality. You often feel they humiliate you in front of friends, but they say this is just a joke. Over time you begin to feel increasingly insecure and start to believe the negative things they are saying.

Case Study 4

You arrange for your partner to meet your parents for the first time. You're feeling nervous but excited and your parents have prepared a meal. After they're more than an hour late you call your partner, and they say they forgot all about it. This isn't the first time they've let you down. Each time they blame you for being unclear about the plans.

Break-ups:

Discussion:

What are some of the worst ways to break up a relationship?

What are some of the best ways to break up a relationship?

What are some of the worst ways to deal with a break-up?

What are some of the best ways to deal with a break-up and get over the end of a relationship? Why can this be so difficult?

Show this video (7 minutes) via YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfxU4GE4vWM>

Reflect on the questions above.



Extension/ homework: Watch this video via YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw2qD87KDHc>

Reflection: How can we learn and grow from breakups.



Further reflection:

What do we owe ourselves when it comes to breakups?

What do we owe our partner(s) when it comes to breakups?

What life skills will be useful?

How does this relate to our character and principles?

Setting and articulating boundaries

Discuss the concept of personal space and boundaries with the class. Everyone has boundaries regarding how they expect themselves—and their property—to be treated. Similarly, everyone values privacy and respect in certain areas of their lives. These boundaries can change over time; something that feels acceptable one day might not feel okay the next, or boundaries might vary depending on the person involved.

Explain to students that the discussion will explore actions or situations that might cross personal boundaries in different ways. Students will consider how much each scenario would bother them, ranging from “A bit irritating” to “Very seriously.”

This activity can be conducted as a whole-class exercise: label one side of the classroom “A bit irritating” and the other side “Very seriously.” Students will then position themselves along a continuum based on how they rank each statement. The teacher can invite students to verbally justify their choices after each statement. Alternatively, the statements could be printed as a card sort activity for pairs or small groups to complete collaboratively.

Explore ways in which boundaries can be effectively communicated and reinforced, as well as strategies for managing issues when boundaries are crossed. Discuss how individuals who cross boundaries can become more aware of their actions and respond appropriately to ensure respect and understanding.

Statements:

Your friend keeps taking your pens out of your pencil case without asking.

An older girl silently walks up to you in the canteen and eats a chip off your plate.

You show a mate a meme on your phone. They begin scrolling through your photo reel even though you ask them not to.

You go for a poo in the school toilet. Unbeknownst to you, someone makes an audio recording and posts the noises anonymously on TikTok with a picture of you. It gets thousands of likes.

You fall asleep at a party on a sofa. You wake up with two boys putting their hands under your clothes and down your underwear.

A girl in the year below touches your bottom every time that you see her in the corridor.

You send a naked picture to the person you are dating. You split up, and they forward the picture to their friends.

You leave your phone unlocked. Some people in your class get hold of it, begin looking through it and laughing.

A girl in the year above tries to kiss you at a party. You pull away, but she grabs you and puts her mouth on yours.

The boy who sits next to you keeps poking you when the teacher is not looking.

You are sent an anonymous nude. You cannot prove who sent it, but think it is from a friend's older brother.

Three boys ping your underwear through your school uniform whenever you see them and nobody is looking.

A group of older students invite you to come and sit with them. One girl in the group pulls out her phone and shows you a short porn clip depicting an extreme sex act. The whole group laughs at you as you are watching.

Discuss with the class:

How would you feel when someone crosses a boundary you have? Are these sorts of scenarios things that might happen in a school community? Is there a broad consensus on which acts are more irritating than serious, or do different people have different boundaries? Move the discussion on to the concept of consent- what is it? Why is it important? How do we know when we have another person's consent?

Pornography

Porn is nothing new but children are being exposed to violent and harmful content from an increasingly early age. Although the full impact of this is difficult to assess, the evidence suggests that:

- Early exposure increases the likelihood of the viewer mimicking what they have seen.
- Some viewers are drawn into viewing increasingly extreme/ harmful content over time. For some, this can involve illegal pornography, including sexual abuse of children.
- For some young people, this is their first sex education, potentially creating harmful ideas about consent and sexual violence. One in four young people (23%) receive no RSE from parents and carers and only one in six (17%) have regular discussions with parents and carers about RSE (Sex Ed Forum's RSE Poll, 2021)
- Degrading and violent sex acts towards women are normalised.
- Potential impact on the viewer: feelings of inadequacy, pressure to mimic porn, desire to mimic violent, abusive behaviours, disappointment/ lack of satisfaction with real sex, jealousy in relationships, unrealistic expectations about sex, concerns about addiction or inability to regulate behaviour.
- Some young people produce self-generated content leading to potential issues with consent, privacy and exploitation.

A 2023 report by the Children's Commissioner found that:

- Average age of first exposure to porn: 13. (10% by age 9 and 27% by age 11)
- 58% of 16 to 21-year-old males and 42% of females said they had intentionally sought out online porn
- 79% had encountered violent pornography before the age of 18
- 47% of young people aged between 16 and 21 believed that girls "expect" physical aggression in sex, and 42% said they believed most girls "enjoy" acts of sexual aggression
- 65% had seen violence towards women in porn and 29% had seen violence towards men
- 35% of young adults had sought out violent pornography involving at least one act of sexual violence

Teaching Suggestions

Principles

- Adopt an evidence based, non-judgemental approach.
- Acknowledge that, irrespective of gender and sexuality:
 - Some people never watch porn.
 - Some people watch porn occasionally.
 - Some people watch porn with their partner.
 - Some people watch a lot of porn.
- Avoid demonising porn or condemning the viewer. Acknowledge that for many people who watch porn, they are able to understand the difference between fantasy and reality and to regulate their viewing.
- Discuss issues as 'potential problems'. Encourage self-reflection and curiosity, rather than shame.

Discussion:

In what ways does sex in porn differ from sex in the real world?

Unpack differences between fantasy and reality. In what ways is sex in porn extreme and far removed from sex in the real world? Things like intimacy, consent, pleasure, communication, contraception, etc.

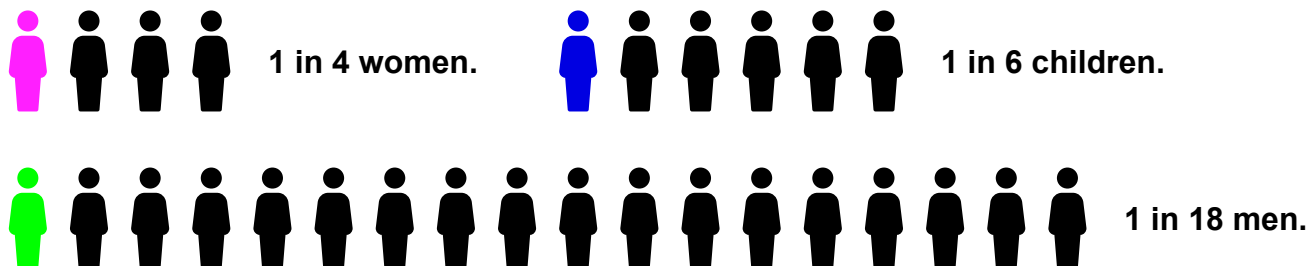
Show students the statistics above from the 2023 report by the Children's Commissioner. Ask for their reflections:

- Is this concerning?
- How do they feel about 9 year olds being exposed to porn?
- How might this negatively affect women (pick up on things like: porn is usually made for a male audience, many of the acts would be degrading and painful, people - especially young people often try to mimic what they have seen in porn, women's sexual pleasure is not accurately depicted, women may feel under pressure to mimic some of the acts etc.)

Put this in the context of the extent of sexual violence in this country:

According to Rape Crisis, England and Wales:

Victims of rape, sexual assault and sexual abuse make up:



- The highest ever number of rapes within a 12-month period was recorded by police in the year ending September 2022: 70,633. In that same time period, charges were brought in just 2,616 rape cases.
- 98% of adults prosecuted for sexual offences are men.

Additionally,

- A woman is killed by a man every 3 days in the UK (Femicide census, 2020).
- 62% of those were killed by a partner, 13% by their son, 8% by a stranger.
- There was a known history of violence and abuse by the perpetrator in 48% of cases.
- Globally, men's violence against women is a leading cause of premature death for women.

Discussion:

Why do some people argue that rape has effectively been decriminalised in this country?

How might porn be contributing to this problem?

How can we all be part of the solution?

Rape Culture

The aims of covering this include:

- Helping students to acquire and apply critical thinking skills to narratives around sexual violence.
- Helping students to develop empathy with victims of sexual violence.
- Empowering students to recognise and challenge rape culture.

Begin by showing students the following scenario and ask them to discuss the various points at which there was fault/ blame:

A 19 year old girl goes to a party with her 29 year old boyfriend. She's worn a dress that her boyfriend loves as it's very revealing. She's told her boyfriend she has condoms in her purse. They haven't had sex yet but she's told him she wants to soon. Over the course of the evening she gets very drunk. And starts falling over and passing out. Her boyfriend puts her to bed and, whilst she's half awake and not making much sense, has sex with her.

Go round and listen to conversations. Pick up on anywhere the blame is being placed on the girl. Discuss as a class and highlight where blame was placed on the girl.

Explain, without judgement that this is evidence of rape culture.

What has happened in the scenario is rape.

Rape is the fault of the perpetrator, not the victim.

What she wore/ picking an older man/ having condoms/ saying she wants to have sex/ being drunk etc. do not indicate consent and do not make this her fault. The fault is the rapists. When we blame the victim, we excuse the perpetrator. This is rape culture.

Explain that rape culture is a term used to describe social trends which normalise, legitimise and glamorise sexual violence. These are different pieces of a puzzle which, when put together, may help to explain factors behind the staggering rates of sexual violence in our society.

Examples of rape culture:

- When 'victim' is redefined as 'slut'.
- Rape jokes.
- Rape threats.
- Slut shaming and double standards.
- The impression that all men are sex crazed and cannot control their desires.
- A disproportionate focus on false accusations.

A case study of rape culture in action:

In 2012, a 16 year old Steubenville High student (female) was raped by 2 boys at a party. As she lay drunk and unconscious, they dragged her around by her feet, offered to pay people to urinate on her, raped her and filmed their crime. They then shared the video with their friends.

Reactions:

- Peers: Many laughed and blamed the girl. They called her a slut and a skank and said nobody liked her anyway.
- Court: 1 and 2 year sentences (the longer sentence for the boy who filmed it).
- Media: A CNN reporter, in her report after the sentencing showed sympathy with the perpetrators, rather than the victim. "These two young men had such promising futures; star football players, very good students. They watched as their lives fell apart".
- Serena Williams: "She shouldn't have put herself in that position"... "Do you think it's fair, what they got?" (Sherwin, 2013). She later apologised and reached out to the victim.
- Twitter: "I feel bad for the two young guys... they did what most people in their situation would have done.", "that's not rape, you're just a loose drunk slut", "the girl asked for it and wanted it"

Discuss: Is this rape culture?

How can each of us challenge rape culture?

Teaching consent

Understanding the law -

Show the following scenarios and ask students to discuss if they think each is sexual harassment, sexual assault or rape:

1. Forcing someone to kiss you.
2. Telling sexually offensive jokes.
3. Lifting up someone's skirt.
4. Forcing a penis into someone's mouth whilst they're asleep.
5. Forcing someone to watch pornography.
6. Making sexual comments or jokes about someone's sexual orientation or gender reassignment.
7. Gesturing or making sexual remarks about someone's body, clothing or appearance.
8. Pressing up against another person for sexual pleasure.
9. Asking constant questions about someone's sex life.
10. A man pressuring a woman to have vaginal sex.
11. A man forcing a man to have anal sex.
12. A woman engaging in oral sex with another woman who is extremely drunk.

Go through the answers and definitions:

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Assault | 8. Assault |
| 2. Harassment | 9. Harassment |
| 3. Assault | 10. Rape |
| 4. Rape | 11. Rape |
| 5. Harassment | 12. Assault |
| 6. Harassment | |
| 7. Harassment | |

Rape: when a person intentionally penetrates another's vagina, anus or mouth with a penis, without the other person's consent.

Sexual assault: act of physical, psychological and emotional violation in the form of a sexual act, inflicted on someone without their consent. It can involve forcing or manipulating someone to witness or participate in any sexual acts. For example, unwanted kissing or touching, coercing someone into a sex act, revealing someone's genitals without their consent.

Sexual harassment: unwanted behaviour of a sexual nature. For example, commenting on someone's body, asking questions about their sex life, continually asking someone on a date after they've said no, using a position of power to manipulate someone for sexual purposes.

Understanding consent -

Discussion:

- How can we define consent?
- What might be happening if consent is not granted?
- What might be happening when consent is granted?

Help students to unpack.

- How can we define consent?
 - ACTIVE and WILLING participation throughout.
 - **Active** = responsive, into it, saying yes (verbally or non-verbally), making positive noises.
 - **Willing** = they want it! They understand what they're doing (not too drunk or too young).
 - It's a feedback loop:
 - Check in with your partner 'Is this what you want', 'does this feel good', 'do you like that', etc.
 - Check in with yourself – are you happy with what's happening, does it feel good? If not, try to speak up. Be as clear and assertive as you can.
 - Consent is a 'hell yes!'
- What might be happening if consent is not granted?
 - Students will often talk about someone resisting/ fighting/ saying 'no'. Also pick up on factors like being underage, drunk, asleep. Explore why, sometimes, people freeze and feel that they cannot use their voice - silence or capitulation should not be taken as consent.
- What might be happening when consent is granted? Both people show with their words and their bodies that this is what they want. They both feel empowered to set their boundaries and respect their partner's. They are actively and willingly undressing, touching each other, checking in.

Discussion and reflection:

What should you do if you are unsure if consent has been granted or if you perceive there to be a grey area?

Allow some discussion of situations when this might occur e.g. if people have been drinking a lot of alcohol or if they feel they are getting mixed messages.

If there is any ambiguity or doubt, they should protect themselves and partner by stopping.

Clear communication is key. Remind them of the feedback loop of consent. Remind them that sex should be pleasurable for both people and leave both people feeling empowered.

Finish the lesson with a positive message that when two people are consenting this will be clear. Our aim is to empower them to understand what consent looks like and know how to get this right in practice.

Agony aunt/ advice scenarios

This activity could be done in pairs or small groups as a discussion task involving all scenarios, or students could be given one scenario to write an agony aunt style response to.

All scenarios imagine that a friend has come to you asking for advice on what they should consider doing next:

Scenario 1:

Your friend was at a party. She got very drunk and ended up kissing a boy. He began touching her sexually, but when he took his clothes off she asked him to stop. He kept insisting, and in the end she stopped speaking and let him have sex with her, even though she clearly did not want to. He has told all his friends that she is a slag, and she is now getting sexually suggestive SnapChat messages from some of them.

Scenario 2:

Your friend sent a nude to his girlfriend. They split up, and he has now become aware that she has shared the photo with some of her friends, who have been laughing at the size of his penis. People all across the school have been waving their little finger at him in corridors and giggling, implying that he has a small penis.

Scenario 3:

Your friend says that he went to a party at the weekend. Everyone had a lot to drink, and he ended up snogging another boy he really fancied. They both fell asleep cuddling. Your friend woke up, took off the other boy's pants and began giving him oral sex. The other boy quickly woke up, but he was furious, told your friend he wasn't gay, and to stop it.

Scenario 4:

Your friend recently ended her relationship with her girlfriend. Her ex-girlfriend is going around telling people that your friend groped and touched her sexually without her consent, even though your friend tells you that they only ever kissed and held hands in the time that they were together.

Scenario 5:

Your friend has recently started hanging out with a boy three years older than her. She has started vaping, and it turns out that this boy is buying vapes for her. She eventually admits that he gives her the vapes in return for having sex with him. She tells you that she is in love with him, that he has invited her to a party at the weekend with a few of his mates, and they have offered to buy her a bottle of vodka for the party.

Scenario 6:

Your friend says that she really fancies a boy, but he rejected her when she asked him out. She has sent him messages on WhatsApp declaring her love for him, and has sent him pictures of her boobs on SnapChat. He has stopped responding to the messages, so she tells you that she has started rubbing his legs and crotch under the table in a lesson where they sit next to each other. She tells you she thinks it is only a matter of time before he changes his mind and says he will go out with her.

Discuss what advice would be offered in each of these scenarios. The idea is to get students to consider how they would respond to someone who may have been a victim of child-on-child sexual violence or sexual harassment, or even someone who may have perpetrated it themselves. Are there times when it would be appropriate to involve an adult, and, if so, who (teacher, parent, police)?

Teaching Female Sexual Pleasure

Unpacking terms

Begin by asking students to define what we mean by the term ‘having sex’ (group discussion). Seek feedback as a class. Unpack the following:

- Sex is often understood in heteronormative, phallogentric terms (penis in vagina, concludes when the man ejaculates, etc.).
- Other terms can often reinforce this idea e.g. 'foreplay' / 'we did everything but...'
- These ideas are often tied up in historical and cultural ideas about procreation, marriage, virginity and women's purity.

Discuss - are there limitations to this approach?

Share this definition of sex by Dr Karen Gurney (2024):

“Sex is something we can do alone, or with another person, or with more than one other person, with our body, or mind, to give or receive erotic pleasure.”

Seek feedback on this.

Follow this with a discussion of the concept of 'losing your virginity'. Look at different historical and cultural conceptions of virginity and ask pupils to unpack the usefulness of this concept today.

Sexual Pleasure

Ask groups to reflect on how people experience sexual pleasure.

Tease out the following:

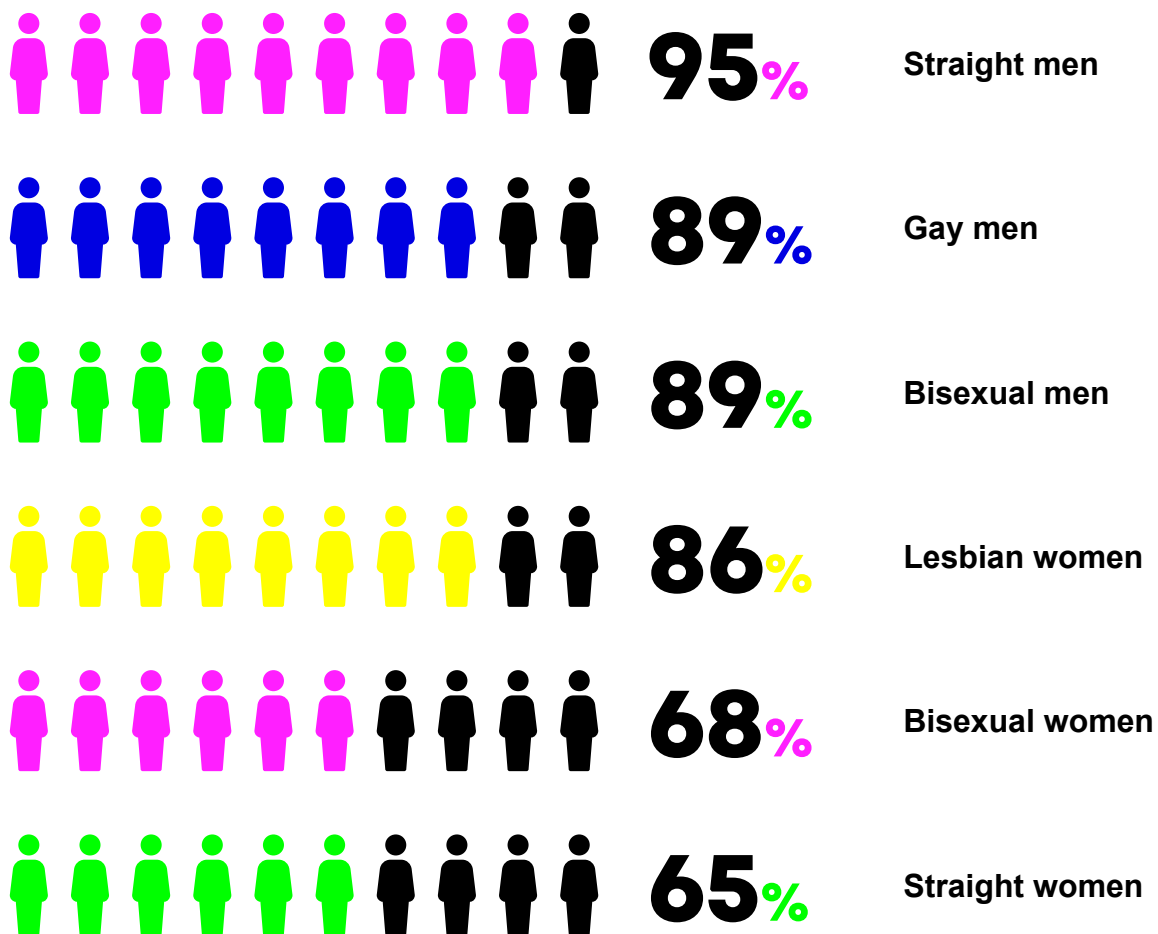
- Not necessarily in person/ involving touch
- Not necessarily genitals/ orgasms
- May build over a long period
- Mutual
- Most likely to happen when the body and mind are ready and willing
- Orgasms usually involve genitals but not always

Ask pupils to draw and label the male and female genitals. Don't assist them with this. You will probably find that they are more comfortable and knowledgeable about male genitalia. Have a discussion on why this might be. Pupils may also mislabel the female genitalia as the 'vagina'. Correct them by using the term 'vulva' and explain that the vagina is inside the body. Show labelled diagrams of each. Spend time discussing each and ensure that all pupils understand the location of the clitoris, urethra, vaginal opening and labia.

Explain that:

- The clitoris has 8000 nerve endings (double that of the penis) and 1500 across the vulva and vagina.
- The only function of the clitoris is sexual pleasure.
- Most women do not orgasm from penetration alone.
- Many women are capable of multiple orgasms.
- Some women ejaculate.
- Some women fake orgasms.
- Some people argue that having sex without the clitoris is like having sex without the penis.

Look at the graphic below on the orgasm gap and ask pupils to share their thoughts on what might explain this.



Source: <https://www.delicto.com/blogs/sex-ed/the-orgasm-gap>



Understanding the Orgasm Gap

The “orgasm gap” refers to the disparity in sexual satisfaction, where men are more likely than women to reach orgasm during heterosexual encounters. This gap is influenced by various cultural, social, and interpersonal factors, including:

One partner’s pleasure is prioritised over the other:

Traditional sexual scripts often place male pleasure at the centre of sexual activity, sidelining female satisfaction.

Some women find it difficult to orgasm:

This is less often the case in sexual relationships with other women, highlighting the role of attention to female pleasure and communication.

Cultural prioritisation of male pleasure:

Our society frequently centres male sexual gratification through influences such as rape culture, pornography, and traditional RSE, all of which tend to neglect female sexual agency.

Seeking validation through the male gaze:

Some women may prioritise their male partner’s pleasure over their own, seeking validation by conforming to societal expectations of being desirable or “pleasing.”

Lack of education about female anatomy:

Many individuals, including women themselves, lack sufficient understanding of the clitoris and its role in female pleasure, leading to less effective communication and exploration during sexual experiences.

Focus on penetrative sex:

Cultural narratives frequently define sex as penetration, which does not align with how many women achieve orgasm, leading to frustration or dissatisfaction.

Internalised shame about female sexuality:

Women may feel discomfort or embarrassment about discussing their desires due to societal stigma or limited conversations about female pleasure.

Unrealistic depictions of female pleasure in media and porn:

Misleading portrayals of women achieving instant gratification without communication or effort can create unrealistic expectations and leave real experiences lacking.

Unequal communication in relationships:

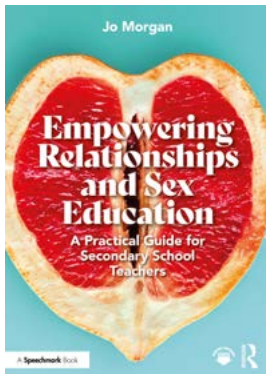
Women may feel less empowered to express their needs or desires during sexual encounters, leading to unbalanced experiences.

Overemphasis on performance over connection:

Cultural narratives often stress physical performance, which can overshadow emotional connection and mutual enjoyment, particularly for women.

For more detailed tips please see:

Empowering Relationships and Sex Education -
A Practical Guide for Secondary School Teachers by Jo Morgan



Buy your copy here:

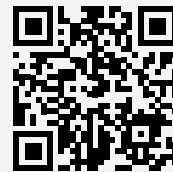
<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Empowering-Relationships-Sex-Education-Practical/dp/103257125X>



For training and student talks to accompany this resource please see
engenderingchange.co.uk and contact jo@engenderingchange.co.uk

Visit our website:

<https://www.engenderingchange.co.uk>



Recommended Resources:

<https://anti-bullyingalliance.org.uk/tools-information/all-about-bullying/sexual-and-sexist-bullying>



<https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-5/addressing-misogyny-toxic-masculinity-and-social-media-influence-in-pshe-education>



<https://www.london.gov.uk/VAWGToolkit#12-activity-2-have-a-word-with-yourself-and-then-your-mates-video>



<https://www.isaschools.org.uk/static/8acd3303-49f4-49cf-ab3e814b53825c42/SIA-Aspirational-Misogyny-FINAL.pdf>



<https://schoolofsexed.org/guidance-for-schools>



<https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/resources>



Reference list

Bates, L., 2022. Fix the System, Not the Women. Simon and Schuster.

[Children's Commissioner \(2023\) 'A lot of it is actually just abuse' Young people and pornography.](#) (Accessed 2 July 2023)

[delicto.com/blogs/sex-ed/the-orgasm-gap](#) (Accessed 7 January 2025)

[Department for Education \(2024\) Keeping Children Safe in Education \(2024\).](#)
(Accessed: 16 December 2024)

[Department for Education \(2020\) Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education.](#) (Accessed: 13 May 2023)

[Everyone's Invited](#) (Accessed 16 December 2024)

[Farrer & Co \(2022\) Addressing child-on-child abuse: a resource for schools and colleges.](#) (Accessed: 20 June 2023)

[Femicide Census., \(2020\). Femicide Census 2020.](#) (Accessed 3 June 2023)

[Goldfarb, E.S. and Lieberman, L.D. \(2021\) Three Decades of Research: The Case for Comprehensive Sex Education. Journal of Adolescent Health, 68, 13-27.](#)
(Accessed: 20 June 2023)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education> (Accessed: 7 January 2025)

Gurney, K., on Brunson, P. (2024). We need to Talk: The Sex Doctor: WOMEN'S ORGASMS - What You Didn't Know! Podcast. 19 November 2024.

[House of Commons Justice Committee \(2017\) Restorative Justice.](#)
(Accessed: 19 July 2023)

Morgan, J (2024) Empowering Relationships and Sex Education - A Practical Guide for Secondary School Teachers. Routledge.

National Police Chiefs' Council (2024) Violence Against Women and Girls

(VAWG). National Policing Statement 2024. (Accessed 16 December 2024)

Ofsted (2021) Review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges. (Accessed 14 May 2023)

Unesco (2018) International technical guidance on sexuality education: an evidence-informed approach. (Accessed 13 May 2023)

Rape Crisis England and Wales (2022) Rape and sexual assault statistics.
(Accessed: 14 May 2023)

Sex Ed Forum (2022) Relationships and Sex Education: The Evidence.
(Accessed: 28 May 2023)

Sherwin, A (2013) Serena Williams apologises after comment that rape victim 'shouldn't have put herself in that position'. The Independent., 19 June.
(Accessed: 25 August 2023)

Walsh K, Zwi K, Woolfenden S, Shlonsky A (2015) School-based education programmes for the prevention of child sexual abuse. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2015, Issue 4. Art. No.: CD004380. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD004380.pub3. (Accessed 25 August 2023)

Acknowledgements:

Huge thanks goes to -

Portsmouth Youth Cabinet

for engaging in the consultation and providing quotes.

Trafalgar School

for engaging in the consultation, providing quotes and sharing their leading work on Restorative Practice.

Portsmouth City Council

for commissioning Engendering Change Ltd to produce this Toolkit.

[illegible]