

Information for Parents: RSHE Changes from September 2026

Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE)

From September 2026, all schools in England must follow the updated statutory guidance for Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education published by the Department for Education. The guidance applies to all maintained schools and academies and forms part of the national curriculum expectations for schools.

An Important Message for Parents

Relationships and Health Education are statutory subjects. This means schools are legally required to teach them. They are not optional. Relationships Education is compulsory for all primary-aged pupils, and Health Education is compulsory in all state-funded schools.

The Department for Education states that these subjects help children develop the knowledge, understanding and skills needed to:

- Build healthy relationships.
 - Stay safe, including online.
 - Understand personal wellbeing and mental health.
 - Recognise harmful situations and seek help.
 - Prepare for the opportunities and responsibilities of adult life.
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What Is Changing from September 2026?

The updated guidance places a stronger emphasis on:

Online Safety

Children will learn more about:

- Social media safety.
- Fake online identities.
- Privacy and personal information.
- AI-generated content and deepfakes.
- Online bullying and harmful content.

- Reporting concerns and seeking support.

Safeguarding and Personal Safety

Children will receive age-appropriate teaching about:

- Personal boundaries.
- Consent and respect.
- Recognising unsafe situations.
- Grooming and exploitation.
- Bullying and cyberbullying.
- How to report concerns and ask for help.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

New guidance strengthens teaching about:

- Emotional wellbeing.
- Managing feelings.
- Loneliness and isolation.
- Building resilience.
- Seeking support when needed.

Healthy Relationships

Pupils will learn:

- How to build positive friendships.
- Respect for others.
- Family relationships.
- Conflict resolution.
- Self-respect and kindness.
- Respecting differences and diversity.

Health Education

Children will continue to learn about:

- Physical health.
- Healthy eating.
- Physical activity.
- Sleep.

- Personal hygiene.
 - Puberty and growing up.
 - Online wellbeing.
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Protected Characteristics and RSHE

Teaching Respect, Equality and Inclusion

A key part of the updated RSHE guidance is helping children understand the importance of respect, equality and kindness towards others. Schools are required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and ensure that RSHE is taught in a way that does not discriminate against any pupil.

The guidance makes clear that pupils should learn about the law relating to protected characteristics and understand that everyone should be treated with dignity and respect.

What Are Protected Characteristics?

Under the Equality Act 2010, the protected characteristics are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

How Are Protected Characteristics Covered in Primary School?

At primary level, children are **not taught detailed sex education through relationships education**. Instead, they learn about:

- Respecting differences between people.
- Treating others with kindness.
- Challenging stereotypes and prejudice.
- Different family structures.

- The importance of inclusion.
- Understanding that everyone's family circumstances may be different.

For example, children learn that families can take many forms, including:

- Married parents
- Single-parent families
- Adoptive families
- Foster families
- Kinship care arrangements
- Families with same-sex parents

The focus is on recognising that loving, caring relationships are important and that all families deserve respect.

What Will Children Learn About Sexual Orientation and Gender Reassignment?

The statutory guidance states that pupils should understand the importance of equality and respect throughout their education. Schools are encouraged to include same-sex parents when discussing families and relationships so that all children see their family experiences reflected positively and respectfully.

At primary school, this is taught within the context of:

- Families
- Respect
- Kindness
- Inclusion
- Anti-bullying education

It is **not taught as sex education**.

Can Parents Withdraw Their Child From This Learning?

No.

Teaching about:

- Respect
- Equality
- Different families
- Protected characteristics

- Anti-bullying
- Relationships Education

forms part of the **statutory** Relationships Education curriculum and children cannot be withdrawn from it.

Parents may only request withdrawal from specific sex education lessons that fall outside Relationships Education, Health Education and the National Curriculum for Science.

Why Is This Teaching Important?

The purpose of teaching about protected characteristics is to help children:

- Understand the world around them.
- Recognise and challenge prejudice and bullying.
- Develop respect for others.
- Build positive and healthy relationships.
- Understand their rights and responsibilities as citizens.
- Prepare for life in modern Britain.

This is closely linked to the school's safeguarding responsibilities and commitment to creating a safe, respectful and inclusive environment for every child.

Understanding the Difference Between RSHE and Sex Education

One of the most common misconceptions is that RSHE and Sex Education are the same thing.

They are **not**.

Relationships and Health Education (Compulsory)

Relationships and Health Education includes:

- ✓ Friendships
- ✓ Families
- ✓ Respectful relationships
- ✓ Online safety
- ✓ Bullying prevention

- ✓ Mental wellbeing
- ✓ Physical health
- ✓ Personal safety
- ✓ Puberty
- ✓ Safeguarding
- ✓ Knowing how and where to get help

All children must take part in this learning and parents cannot withdraw their child from it.

Sex Education (Separate from Relationships Education)

Sex Education refers specifically to teaching about human reproduction, conception and birth beyond the statutory science curriculum. In primary schools, sex education is not compulsory, although schools may choose to teach it, particularly in Years 5 and 6.

Where schools teach additional sex education:

- Parents have the right to request withdrawal.
 - Schools will explain clearly what content is being taught.
 - Parents will be informed in advance.
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What Parents Can and Cannot Withdraw From

Parents Cannot Withdraw Their Child From:

- ✗ Relationships Education
- ✗ Health Education
- ✗ Safeguarding lessons
- ✗ Online safety lessons
- ✗ Mental wellbeing education
- ✗ Puberty education included within Health Education
- ✗ National Curriculum Science lessons, including human development and reproduction taught through Science.

Parents May Request Withdrawal From:

✓ Specific Sex Education lessons that fall outside:

- Relationships Education
- Health Education
- National Curriculum Science

In primary schools, headteachers must grant requests for withdrawal from these specific sex education lessons.

Examples

Topic	Withdrawal Possible?
Friendships	No
Families and relationships	No
Online safety	No
Bullying and cyberbullying	No
Mental wellbeing	No
Personal safety and safeguarding	No
Puberty	No
Human reproduction taught through Science	No
Additional Sex Education lesson on conception and birth (outside Science)	Yes

Working in Partnership with Parents

The updated guidance places a strong emphasis on transparency and working with families. Schools are expected to:

- Consult parents when reviewing RSHE policies.
- Share information about what will be taught.
- Allow parents to view teaching materials on request.
- Support parents in discussing RSHE topics at home.

(NB – The teaching materials for our Ten: Ten Life To The Full Plus curriculum can be viewed through our Parent Portal. <https://www.tentenresources.co.uk/parent-portal/> username: st-peters-le9 password: jelly-ice-cream)

The guidance is clear that while parents should be informed and consulted, **parents cannot veto statutory curriculum content**. Schools must teach the required content set out in the statutory guidance.

Key Messages

From September 2026, Relationships, Health and safeguarding education remain compulsory for all pupils.

Children cannot be withdrawn from these aspects of the curriculum because they help keep children safe, support their wellbeing and prepare them for life in modern Britain. Parents can only request withdrawal from specific sex education lessons that go beyond the statutory Relationships, Health and Science curriculum.

Teaching about protected characteristics is **part of statutory Relationships Education**, not sex education. Children learn about equality, respect, different families and the law in an age-appropriate way that promotes kindness, inclusion and understanding. As with other aspects of Relationships Education, parents do not have the right to withdraw their child from this learning

We value our partnership with parents and remain committed to delivering RSHE in an age-appropriate, sensitive and inclusive way that reflects both statutory requirements and our school's values.

You can view full guidance on RSHE statutory requirements from the DfE by following this link [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education guidance](#)