



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

# **Draft relationships and sexuality education (RSE) statutory guidance and code**



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**OGL**

Digital ISBN 978-1-80391-464-0  
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WG44180

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## Legal status of this guidance

This section sets out statutory guidance in relation to RSE and is published under section 71 of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021 (the Act), it is designed to assist those responsible under the Act to design RSE as part of the curriculum.

## Introduction

Relationships and sexuality education (RSE) is a statutory requirement in the Curriculum for Wales framework and is mandatory for all learners from age 3-16.

RSE has a positive and empowering role in learners' education and plays a vital role in supporting them to realise the [four purposes](#) as part of a [whole school approach](#). Helping learners to form and maintain a range of relationships, all based on mutual trust and respect, is the foundation of RSE. These relationships are critical to the development of emotional well-being, resilience and empathy. An understanding of sexuality with an emphasis on rights, health, equality and [equity](#) empowers learners to understand themselves, take responsibility for their own decisions and behaviours and form relationships that are fully inclusive, reflecting [diversity](#) and promoting respect.

Schools and settings have an important role to play in creating safe and empowering environments that support learners' rights to enjoy fulfilling, healthy and safe relationships throughout their lives. This is critical to building a society which treats others with understanding and empathy, whatever their ethnicity; social economic background; disability; or [sex, gender](#) or sexuality.

This section of the Curriculum for Wales framework contains:

- the RSE Code: this sets out the mandatory learning at developmentally appropriate phases
- the supporting statutory guidance: this provides support in developing RSE in a curriculum both as essential learning in its own right and also as a cross-cutting element in all Areas.

The section below makes clear what is part of the mandatory code and what is statutory guidance. A link to schools' and settings' legal duties on RSE can be found in the [legislative summary](#) section of this framework guidance.

## Why is RSE so important?

The world around us is evolving rapidly and significantly. As a society we are becoming ever more aware of:

- changing family structures and relationships

- shifting social, cultural and religious norms in relation to sex, gender and sexuality
- advances in technology including the rising influence of social media and increased use of digital communications and devices,
- changing laws and rights around relationships, sex, gender and sexuality.

In this context, RSE is an important support in enabling learners to navigate these changes. Understanding how relationships are formed, developed and maintained enables children and young people to develop skills and attitudes to support them in their own relationships throughout their lives. These may include family relationships, friendships, professional relationships, romantic and sexual relationships. Learning about both relationships and sexuality supports young people to develop the knowledge and skills needed to make sense of their thoughts and feelings and to effectively navigate rapidly changing influences. Learners need to be supported to respond to these and, where appropriate, feel equipped to challenge harmful stereotypes and perceptions and seek help and support.

RSE has the potential to be transformative for learners and communities - it is important in empowering learners and in developing their critical thinking. Children and young people are navigating a range of complex and contradictory messages about relationships and sexuality that will shape their sense of self and their relationships with others. High quality RSE provision will support learners to critically engage with what they are learning and experiencing. This supports them to understand their values and beliefs and to **advocate** for respect and understanding of others.

The Welsh Government believes all children and young people have the right to receive high-quality, holistic and **inclusive** education about relationships and sexuality. High-quality, holistic and inclusive RSE is associated with a range of positive and protective outcomes for all learners and their communities and can, for example:

- help increase learners' understanding of and participation in healthy, safe, and fulfilling relationships
- help young people recognise abusive or unhealthy relationships and seek support
- help reduce all **bullying**, including homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and increase safety and well-being for all learners
- help all learners make informed decisions about sexual intimacy and reproductive health
- help promote equality and equity of sex, gender and sexuality
- increase **awareness**, **knowledge** and **understanding** of gender-based and sexual violence.

## What is RSE?

RSE encompasses the knowledge, skills, dispositions and values that will empower learners to:

- support their health and well-being
- develop healthy, safe and fulfilling relationships of all kinds, including those with family and friends, and in time, romantic and sexual relationships
- navigate and make sense of how relationships, sex, gender and sexuality shape their own and other people's identities and lives
- understand and support their rights and those of others to enjoy equitable, safe, healthy and fulfilling relationships throughout their lives and advocate for these.

RSE provision helps to ensure learners develop a positive understanding of relationships and sexuality and recognise misconceptions. RSE aims to empower learners in line with their needs, experiences and wider development. Through discussion and by responding to learners' questions and needs, it can provide safe and empowering environments that enable learners to reflect on and express their views and feelings on a range of issues.

RSE in the curriculum focuses on three broad strands:

- Relationships and identity: helping learners develop the skills they need to develop healthy, safe, and fulfilling relationships with others and helping them to make sense of their thoughts and feelings.
- Sexual health and well-being: helping learners to draw on factual sources regarding their sexual and reproductive health and well-being allowing them to make informed decisions throughout their lives.
- Empowerment, safety and respect: helping protect them from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect and enabling them to recognise unsafe or harmful relationships and situations, supporting them to recognise when, how and where to seek support and advice.

## **Principles and approaches of effective RSE**

To achieve the aims set out above, the following principles and approaches provide guidance and support for schools and settings as they design and realise RSE within their curriculum:

- Whole-school approach:

Teaching and learning in RSE should be supported by a whole school approach to RSE and this is critical to supporting learners' well-being. This means effectively linking all aspects of school, including the curriculum, policy, staff, school environment and community to support learners in their relationships and sexuality education. This should support the development of positive relationships, allowing learners

and practitioners to thrive; reinforce a consistent positive ethos and provide holistic high quality support for practitioners and learners.

A whole school approach should include consideration of leadership and policy around RSE. This should include the participation of the senior leadership team in developing the school's vision for RSE as well as the designation of a RSE lead within the school. This should also consider how curriculum and pedagogy supports and informs the development of the wider approach. Professional learning is also key. The senior leadership team should ensure that all staff participate in professional learning. Schools should also consider how the culture and environment can support RSE.

- Enabling human rights:

Schools and settings should discuss RSE in the context of children's rights as protected by the [UNCRC](#). A rights based approach supported by equity should be embedded in the learning.

The Children's Commissioner has published a guide for schools [The Right Way: A Children's Rights Approach for Education in Wales](#). This should inform how settings embed a rights-based approach in the curriculum, including RSE. Rights provide learners with a way of exploring RSE issues, helping them to develop the foundational skills for healthy relationships; respect and understanding of others and to recognise healthy and harmful behaviours

In this way, learners develop an understanding of how rights are related to all aspects of RSE and contribute to the freedom, dignity, well-being and safety of all people. This also helps learners understand the importance of equity, recognising the importance of rights in ensuring fair treatment for all

Schools and settings should expressly consider [children's rights](#). Learning in RSE should highlight the right to:

- non-discrimination (Article 2)
- to be heard and involved in decision-making (Article 12)
- to freedom of expression (Article 13)
- to follow your own religion (Article 14)
- to have privacy (Article 16)
- to access information to make informed decisions (Article 17)
- not be harmed and should be looked after and kept safe (Article 19)
- to experience the highest attainable health, access to health facilities, and preventative health care (Article 24)
- to education that prepares children to understanding others (Article 29)
- to protection from sexual abuse and exploitation (Article 34)
- to get special help if they have been abused (Article 39).

Article 3 - everyone who works with children should always do what is best for each child - is relevant to RSE, as it is to the whole curriculum. Schools and settings can also link learning to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). Learners should also be supported to develop an understanding of the legal duties and protections associated with diversity, gender-based and domestic violence and well-being. Further information on relevant laws can be found in the legislation summary of this guidance

- Inclusivity, including LGBTQ+ inclusivity

In line with the mandatory requirements of the RSE Code, RSE will be realised in a way that is inclusive in accordance with the principles of equality. This helps ensure that all learners can see themselves, their families, their communities and each other reflected across the curriculum and can learn to value difference and diversity as a source of strength. This contributes to a cohesive, fair and equitable society that equips learners with skills for life. This of course includes gender equity and LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

Learners are growing up in a world where gender and sexual identity, cultures, rights and legislation are changing or evolving around the world. In order to be effective, inclusive RSE must start early. From a young age learners can learn about their own uniqueness, how to appreciate diversity and respect the rights of others. This is the foundation for exploring diversity in relationships, gender and sexual identity and for developing the skills and values needed to think critically about gender and sexual norms, rights and inequities. This should include consideration of a range of influences that shape our values and identity. It should help learners to develop understanding of different values, religious beliefs and non-religious convictions that can inform our values and identity around relationships and sexuality.

- RSE as a cross-cutting element

RSE is a broad, interdisciplinary and complex area that includes biological, social, psychological, spiritual, ethical and cultural dimensions.

This means that each Area of the curriculum and the range of subject disciplines within them each have a unique contribution to learning in RSE. RSE should draw on all Areas to allow learners to make connections between their learning in RSE and the wider curriculum, understanding historical, cultural, geographic, physical, political, social and technological perspectives and influences on RSE issues. This also helps avoid a 'single issue' approach where each lesson covers a different RSE issue, isolated from other learning. Schools should consider what each Area can authentically bring to an understanding of RSE. This should be meaningful and should avoid superficial or tenuous links.

The Designing Your Curriculum section for each Area includes support on how each Area can authentically contribute to RSE (see full extract below).

- Developmentally-appropriate learning

All learning in RSE should be developmentally appropriate and consider the following:

Responding to learners' needs, experiences, and evolving knowledge:

Schools should include [learners' perspectives](#) to ensure relevant and responsive RSE and provide increasing opportunities for learners to help direct their learning as they progress. Learners' views about what, how and where they learn should be taken into consideration so that the RSE curriculum can truly reflect the experiences that children and young people encounter in society.

Broad developmental appropriateness within the RSE Code:

The RSE Code sets out each strand of teaching and learning in three broad developmental [phases](#) as follows:

- Phase 1 - from age 3
- Phase 2 - from age 7
- Phase 3 - from age 11

Each phase represents the building blocks of progression in RSE. As learners progress, they should build on previous learning from either phase one; or phases one and two; consolidating and strengthening the same dispositions, knowledge and skills and applying them in new and relevant contexts as they develop. This is very different to simply acquiring learning about topics in isolation and then moving on to other content.

Schools should have regard to the mandatory strands of developmentally appropriate content within the RSE Code to develop their approach, and should recognise learners' social, physical, emotional and cognitive development and needs during their planning.

During the early phase of development, an effective focus on prerequisite skills can enable the learner to successfully respond to situations in a meaningful way, thus supporting all learners with progression. In the early phase, this is how most RSE topics are considered.

Understanding the nature of progression in RSE:

The principles of progression across the [Health and well-being Area](#) offer guidance to [progression](#) in RSE. Learning should revisit content,

themes and topics as outlined in any of the preceding phases set out in the RSE Code below, reinforcing and building on learners' developing understanding and changing needs. As they develop, learners should be encouraged to take increasing responsibility for their own learning.

RSE for learners with special educational needs or additional learning needs:

Schools providing education for learners with moderate and severe, profound and multiple learning needs should consider how best to meet the needs of all learners whose understanding of sexual health and well-being issues may not match their development.

All staff, including ancillary staff, physiotherapists, nurses and carers should be aware of the school's approach to RSE when working with learners with additional learning needs.

RSE provision should be a planned and integrated part of the curriculum, coordinated effectively to ensure continuity and progression in learning across the continuum. Special schools should decide the precise content of the RSE programme which, in many cases, will include careful consideration of the prerequisites for meaningful learning in RSE and the strategies for learning adopted to meet the differing needs of learners,. For example, for learners who use alternative methods of communication, such as signing, symbols or communication switches and aids, schools will need to ensure that all staff are familiar with key RSE terms in Makaton, Braille and British Sign Language, or whatever alternative methods of communication are being used.

- Engaging with learners, parents, carers and wider communities

Schools and settings should have clear lines of communication in relation to RSE and should [engage with learners, parents, carers and the wider community](#), offering them the opportunity to engage with learning and teaching in RSE.

Communicating effectively with parents and carers on an ongoing basis is an important way to foster positive relationships in order to engage them in purposeful and meaningful dialogue. When undertaken well, this can help aid learner progression by helping parents and carers to understand how they can support learning within and outside the school environment. Schools' curricula should also recognise and reflect the needs and contexts of the communities within and beyond the school.

A proactive approach should help to dispel any concerns that parents and carers may have in relation to RSE provision. This should also help to reassure them of the positive nature of RSE by setting out the

proposed learning and resources to be used at the different developmental phases.

Schools and settings should recognise when and where they need to use the support of external organisations and expertise, such as school nurses. School staff should be present at all times when external organisations are engaging with learners. They should also have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the local support services network for support and referral when necessary.

It should be ensured that all resources to be used in schools and settings are relevant, reputable, developmentally appropriate, inclusive and sensitive to learners' needs. Schools should share examples of the resources they plan to use with parents in order to reassure them and to enable conversations, where appropriate, to be reinforced and continued in the home.

- Professional learning

Professional learning is a key requirement for the realisation of high quality RSE, and should occur at a school, cluster, regional and national level.

The senior leadership in schools should ensure that all practitioners contribute to the school's RSE priorities, either through the whole school approach, the cross-cutting element or the essential learning. Schools and settings should facilitate all practitioners' access to professional learning that can support them to develop their confidence, knowledge and skills in RSE.

- Positive, protective and preventative RSE

Building on the Code, the approach to RSE should be positive, protective and preventative, considering how learners might need to be supported to:

- understand and cope with change, conflicts and pressure
- recognise potentially harmful behaviours in relationships and know how to seek support
- have the knowledge to recognise all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect, including [violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence](#)
- seek help and advice where appropriate.

Schools should look to create safe and supportive learning environments. These help create trust and allow learners a safe space to consider learning, ask questions and express their thoughts and feelings. Practitioners should seek to present learning around RSE issues positively and meaningfully. While understanding risks and harm are an important aspect of RSE, using these as the focus for teaching

about RSE issues, or focusing mainly on the negative aspects of RSE is likely to be ineffective or harmful.

This can be achieved by developing a working agreement of ‘ground-rules’ with learners for discussions about RSE. This helps to maintain professional boundaries and keep learners and practitioners safe. For example, creative approaches can help learners share their questions, views and experiences anonymously, allowing more open, honest discussion.

## **RSE Code**

This Code contains mandatory requirements, the legal basis for which is set out in the [legislation summary](#) of this Curriculum for Wales framework guidance. It sets out the themes and matters that must be encompassed in RSE. A curriculum and teaching and learning must encompass the mandatory element of RSE outlined within the following RSE Code.

### **Designing your curriculum**

This mandatory RSE Code supports schools to design their RSE. The content is set within the context of broad and interlinked learning strands, namely

- relationships and identity
- sexual health and well-being
- empowerment, safety and respect.

These strands allow practitioners to design and develop a curriculum tailored to their learners, making connections and developing authentic contexts for learning across the curriculum.

The Welsh Government committed to covering the following themes in RSE: relationships; rights and equity; sex, gender and sexuality; bodies and body image; sexual health and well-being; and violence, safety and support. To assist schools and settings in their planning of RSE, these themes are interwoven into the learning strands.

Across the learning strands, curriculum content in RSE must be inclusive and reflect diversity. It must include learning that develops learners’ awareness and understanding of different identities, views and values and a diversity of relationships, gender and sexuality, including LGBTQ+ lives.

Learning about rights and equity runs through all the strands, as well as embedding learning and experience through a rights-based approach to the learning.

## Content appropriate to learner development

The Act requires that the RSE schools provide must be developmentally appropriate for learners. This means schools and settings must take account of a range of factors including the learner's age; knowledge and maturity; any additional learning needs and anticipating their physiological and emotional development. RSE must be developmentally appropriate for each learner, meaning that learners' needs of similar ages may differ.

The phases have been designed to give practitioners an understanding of what is likely to be developmentally appropriate. For example, in phase 1 and 2, learners will be taught about the principles of general **consent** as pre-requisites for learning about sexual consent at the developmentally appropriate time in phase 3. In practice, this means learners in phases one and two developing an awareness of asking for permission to share materials, for example toys; or learning about respecting personal boundaries. The phases are designed to help schools and settings make judgements about whether learning is developmentally appropriate for specific learners. The ages set out below indicate broadly when practitioners should start to consider whether learning in a phase is developmentally appropriate for their learners. This may mean some learners will be ready for specific learning before the broad indications given in the Code, but likewise it may mean that some learners need opportunity for further development before they engage with specific learning. Introduction to a phase may be gradual: with some learning in that phase being developmentally appropriate for learners sooner than other learning. As outlined above, these decisions must be based on a range of factors.

The tables attached to each strand of learning below are in three broad developmental phases. As they are set out, they represent the building blocks of progression in RSE. As learners progress, they will be building upon previous learning from either phase one; or phases one and two, consolidating and strengthening the same dispositions, knowledge and skills and applying them in new, relevant contexts. This is very different to simply acquiring learning about topics in isolation and then moving on to other content.

The learning for RSE refers to both what is taught expressly and what is embedded throughout the curriculum and in the school environment through the whole school approach.

## Relationships and identity

This strand focuses on:

- the range of relationships that human beings have throughout their lives
- how identity can be shaped by our relationships and sexuality
- the importance of human rights in securing healthy, safe and fulfilling relationships in an inclusive society.

Learners need to develop the understanding and behaviours that will support them to develop and maintain healthy, safe and fulfilling relationships throughout their lives. Learners need to be supported to recognise and value different types of relationships, including families and friendships, as well as the diversity within different types of relationships, including LGBTQ+ diversity, and that these can change over time. Developing empathy, compassion and communication skills are critical to learners' relationships now and the relationships they will form in the future. This will also support respect, understanding and equitable treatment for others, whatever their sex, gender, sexuality, faith or belief.

Learners also need to develop both their sense of self and their sense of everyone being unique. Over time, learners can explore how relationships, sex, gender, romantic and sexual attraction and personal experiences may shape and inform a person's identity and individuality. This supports learners to understand how identity, relationships and sexuality are informed by biology, technology and social, cultural and religious norms and that these may change over time. By engaging with these aspects, learners can recognise both positive and harmful behaviours and norms and have the confidence to speak up for themselves and to speak out and advocate for the rights and respect of others.

This strand also recognises how rights can support and underpin equitable, respectful relationships, as well as a fair and inclusive society.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Practitioners should consider learners' developmental appropriateness for learning in each phase:		
From age 3	From age 7	From age 11
<b>The learning supports:</b>		
Ability to act with kindness, empathy and compassion in interactions with others immediate to them including family, friendship and peer relationships	Ability to form and maintain relationships which are equitable, respectful and kind with a range of others.	Understanding the positive and negative characteristics and healthy or unhealthy aspects of a range of relationships including family, friendship, romantic and sexual.  Ability to develop and understand the importance of equity, mutual respect, and affection in relationships with others.
An <b>awareness</b> of how to communicate wants and needs in relationships, and begin to respect	How understanding and use of effective communication,	Understanding and use of effective communication, decision making, managing

<p>those of others.</p> <p>Awareness of how needs relate to rights.</p>	<p>decision-making, managing conflict and refusal skills are part of ensuring your own and others rights and part of friendships and relationships.</p>	<p>and resolving conflict, and refusal skills in a range of different contexts and types of relationships, offline and online, including intimate relationships.</p> <p>Understanding how to speak out about harmful behaviours directed at them or others.</p>
<p>Awareness of the diversity of families and relationships, including friendship and peer relationships, and why these are important.</p>	<p>Recognition of the characteristics of different families, friendship and peer relationships and the diversity of these.</p> <p>Understanding positive behaviours in relationships and what can happen when relationships breakdown.</p> <p>An awareness of how families, relationships and parenting are shaped by social and cultural norms and laws that have changed over time.</p>	<p>Understanding how the diversity of relationships including marriage, and all types of civil partnership, has changed over time, and how relationships are positively and negatively impacted by social and cultural norms and laws in different ways around the world.</p>
<p>Developing a sense of themselves, in the context of families, friends and communities.</p> <p>Recognising how people value different things and have different families, friends and communities.</p>	<p>Recognising how people's relationships with others shape who they are and their happiness.</p> <p>An awareness of how identity can be expressed in different ways.</p>	<p>Understanding how rights need to be balanced in a diverse society; the characteristics, benefits and challenges of living in a diverse society; and how and why attitudes have changed and are changing including towards gender and sexuality diversity.</p>
<p>Experiencing inclusive behaviours, language and role modelling that show respect for others, whatever their gender.</p>	<p>Valuing and recognising the contributions of everyone; and the importance of sex and gender equality.</p>	<p>An ability to advocate for and advance the rights of all and understand and respect all people in relation to sex, gender and sexuality.</p>

<p>Recognising learners' rights to be treated fairly, kindly and with respect.</p>	<p>Recognise and know how to safely respond to and challenge gender and sexual stereotypes and unfair behaviour.</p> <p>An awareness of how positive and negative social and cultural norms regarding sex, gender and sexuality influence relationships and behaviours</p>	<p>Understanding how the law and human rights secure freedoms around sex, gender and sexuality and how these can differ in other countries and over time.</p> <p>Ability to critically explore and understand how a range of social, cultural and religious norms and influences about relationships, sex, gender and sexuality can shape perceptions and our well-being and can be both positive and harmful.</p>
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## Sexual health and well-being

This strand focuses on:

- learning about how living things grow, reproduce and have a life cycle
- developing an understanding of the human body, including people's feelings about their bodies and how these can be represented
- the health issues related to relationships and sexuality
- an understanding of how sexuality and sexual health affects our well-being.

In early development, learners need to experience contexts for understanding the importance of maintaining personal health and well-being, including hygiene, and how this impacts on themselves and others. This progresses to applying broad principles of health and hygiene within sexual health.

As learners develop, teaching and learning needs to include focus on exploring how physical changes have an impact on well-being and relationships ensuring the representation of LGBTQ+ experiences and lives. Learning also focuses on menstrual well-being and conditions which can affect the reproductive system; as well as developing understanding of the possible outcomes of the decisions made relating to sexual health and relationships. All of this learning will focus on recognising the diversity of human body types, how perception and understanding of the human body is shaped by society, the law, science and technology and the impact of this on well-being.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Practitioners should consider learners' developmental appropriateness for learning in each phase:		
From age 3	From age 7	From age 11
<b>The learning supports:</b>		
<p>The use of accurate terminology for all body parts.</p> <p>An awareness of the human life cycle and that reproduction is a part of life.</p>	<p><b>Knowledge and understanding</b> of how reproductive organs develop in a human body. This includes understanding fertility and the processes of reproduction, including what supports menstrual health and well-being.</p> <p>Recognising the process of pregnancy and birth.</p>	<p>Understanding how fertility, sexual function and menstrual health and well-being can change across the life course and how to find information and support when needed.</p> <p>The knowledge and understanding of how hormones continue to affect emotional and physical health throughout adulthood.</p> <p>Understanding how contraception can assist with reproductive choices, including awareness of abortion.</p>
Awareness of how human bodies change as they grow.	The knowledge and understanding of how people experience significant physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes during puberty.	Understanding of good sexual and reproductive health, including the range of risks and outcomes from sexual experiences and the knowledge needed to support informed decisions about sexual activity and about reproductive choices.
An awareness of the importance of personal self-care and hygiene.	The knowledge and skills needed to manage personal self-care and hygiene, including the importance of menstrual well-being.	The knowledge and understanding of the causes, symptoms and impact of conditions connected to sexual and reproductive health and to fertility, including sexually transmitted

		infections, HIV and reproductive cancers.  Understanding and skills needed to minimise risks and seek help.
A recognition that everyone's body is unique and special to them.	An awareness that there are many different sources of information offline and online that help us learn about our bodies and affect how we feel about our body and other people's bodies.	Critically engaging with positive and negative representations of a diversity of bodies, including through various forms of media and understanding that these can be unrealistic and harmful.
Awareness of the different feelings one can have, recognising other people's feelings and how these may differ to your own.	Awareness of how people can feel attracted to others as they mature and how this can lead to emotional and physical responses.	Understanding how all are entitled to safe and pleasurable relationships and recognising the role consensual sexual activity plays within healthy relationships.  Understanding the legal age of consent.
Recognising trusted adults who can help them and whom they can talk to and ask questions of, especially when they feel unhappy or unsafe.	Be able to identify trustworthy sources of information and able to raise issues and questions with trusted adults.	Recognise and be able to use a range of support services to access information and support around relationships, health and well-being and safety.

## Empowerment, safety and respect

This strand focuses on:

- learners' rights to safety and protection and freedom from harm and discrimination
- how and where to seek information, help and support
- how to support and advocate for the rights, fair treatment and respect of all.

This strand builds on the positive behaviours and skills of healthy relationships. It reinforces the requirement to support learners to develop empathy, kindness and compassion towards each other and empowering them with the confidence to draw upon available support if they are concerned about their own safety or that of others.

Learners should be supported to understand change and conflict and recognise the impact of these on relationships, and where appropriate seek help and support.

They should be supported to understand that exercising their right to be free from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect is enabled by trusted adults who can support their safety. This includes through a number of legal protections that exist for all. Criminal law makes such behaviours unlawful and there are criminal sanctions for those found guilty of committing such offences.

Learners need to develop an understanding of the social, emotional, physical and legal nature and impact of harmful behaviours, including all **bullying**, and LGBTQ+ based bullying, sexual violence and gender-based violence in a range of contexts, including online.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3
Practitioners should consider learners' developmental appropriateness for learning in each phase:		
From age 3	From age 7	From age 11
<b>The learning supports:</b>		
<p>Recognising harmful behaviour including behaviours which are discriminatory and the right to be free from discrimination.</p> <p>Ability to interact with others in a way that is fair.</p>	<p>Understanding of the importance of fair treatment for all and of respect in all interpersonal interactions offline and online.</p> <p>Recognising the value of non-discriminatory behaviours and when and how to take safe action to respond to and challenge discriminatory behaviours.</p>	<p>Understanding the importance of inclusivity, including for LGBTQ+ people, non-discrimination and the value of diversity in our interpersonal behaviours and relationships.</p> <p>Developing a sense of individual and social responsibility to others, including consideration of how we respond to behaviours that are discriminatory, disrespectful and harmful, offline and online.</p>

<p>Recognising the right to be free from harmful, abusive and bullying behaviour.</p> <p>An awareness of how to recognise positive and harmful behaviours, including bullying.</p> <p>Ability to share with a trusted adult when faced with harmful behaviours.</p>	<p>Understanding of the right for everyone to be free from harm or abuse.</p> <p>An awareness of different kinds of harmful or abusive behaviour including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect, including and peer on peer harassment and bullying and the role technology can play.</p> <p>How to seek support for oneself, and offer support to others.</p> <p>How to be a good friend and advocate for others.</p>	<p>Recognising harmful, abusive or coercive behaviour in personal relationships including control, violence and sexual violence and how to respond and seek help for self and others. This includes all forms of violence based on sex, gender and sexuality.</p>
<p><i>(Phases 1 and 2 include pre-requisite knowledge and skills for understanding the learning on consent at phase 3)</i></p> <p>Beginning to recognise that other people have thoughts, feelings and opinions that are different.</p> <p>An awareness of the need to seek agreement in order to share, for example toys.</p> <p>An awareness of everyone's right to privacy, personal boundaries and which parts of the body are private.</p> <p>Ability to communicate if someone is touching them in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Understanding of the right to bodily privacy, personal boundaries including online.</p> <p>Understanding how behaviours may be perceived by others offline and online.</p> <p>Recognising which steps to take to keep safe from harm both in offline and online friendships.</p> <p>Understanding the social and emotional norms and pressures that lead to non-consensual behaviours, friendships and relationships, for example, gender norms.</p> <p>Developing the skills to build consensual behaviours and relationships and know how to safely respond, challenge and report non-consensual behaviours</p>	<p>Understanding of the importance of consent for safe and healthy relationships and in particular sexual relationships.</p> <p>Understanding of how consent can be communicated in different social contexts and relationships, including online.</p> <p>A critical understanding of how consent is impacted by perception and social context and the factors that influence and impair people's ability to engage in consensual behaviour, for example, substances, violence, coercion and relationship norms.</p>

	<p>and relationships offline and online.</p>	
<p>Awareness of how to keep safe when using digital media, including sharing with a trusted adult when they feel uncomfortable or scared.</p>	<p>Know how and when digital media can be shared safely, with permission and when it can be a source of harm.</p> <p>Awareness of the benefits and dangers of the internet and social media in forming friendships online.</p> <p>Exploring the motives behind fabricated and digitally-altered media.</p> <p>An understanding of the need to keep safe online, an ability to take steps to protect themselves and an ability to share with trusted adults where something is seen that shouldn't have been, or is upsetting or uncomfortable.</p>	<p>Understand the ethical and legal issues relating to the consensual and non-consensual sharing of self-generated imagery, and rights to safety, support well-being and protection.</p> <p>Understanding the impacts associated with sexual material and intimacy online, including the ethical and legal implications.</p> <p>An awareness of how sexual material and media often represents gender, sexual activity, bodily appearance and relationships in unrealistic and harmful ways.</p>

<p>An awareness that everyone has the right to be safe and no one is allowed to harm anyone else.</p> <p>Ability to speak up for each other.</p>	<p>Awareness of laws in place to protect from different forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect and harassment.</p>	<p>An understanding of laws around RSE issues that are in place to protect us from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect and harassment, and that laws are intended to protect not criminalise young people.</p> <p>An understanding of how to advocate for safe environments and the rights and understanding of everyone on a range of RSE issues.</p> <p>Appreciate the importance of safely speaking out against sex and gender based and sexual violence.</p>
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## Glossary

Term	Definition
Advocate	(eirioili) to support the rights of others by helping to make sure their views and experiences are listened to and to inform decisions.
Awareness, knowledge and understanding	(Ymwybyddiaeth, gwybodaeth a dealltwriaeth) in early development, learners experience holistic approaches to exploring relationships and are supported in shaping an understanding of themselves in the world. Learners have more awareness as they progress in their learning with concepts being introduced gradually according to learner development. As they move through the continuum, learners gain increased knowledge and understanding, and often experience of, the different themes that are part of RSE curriculum content.
Bullying	(Bwlio) Behaviour by an individual or group, usually repeated over time, that intentionally hurts others either physically or emotionally.
Consent	(Cydsyniad) when one person provides informed and free consent for another person to do something that affects them. It is important for people to ask for consent before they do something that affects another person. It is also important for a person's decision to be respected – if they say 'no' to something, then the other person should not go ahead with their action.
Equity	(Tegwch) fair and impartial treatment, including equal treatment or differential treatment to redress imbalances in rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.

Gender	(Rhywedd) often used to refer to whether someone identifies as female, male or non-binary. Gender can also refer to the social and cultural norms and differences that different societies have about how people behave, look or dress. People often find an important sense of identity in these but they can also perpetuate discrimination, inequalities and harms.
Gender-based violence (GBV)	(Trais ar sail rhywedd) (a) violence, threats of violence or harassment arising directly or indirectly from values, beliefs or customs relating to gender or sexual orientation; (b) female genital mutilation; (c) forcing a person (whether by physical force or coercion by threats or other psychological means) to enter into a religious or civil ceremony of marriage (whether or not legally binding).
Inclusive	(Cynhwysol) the process of strengthening the capacity of the education system to reach out to all learners. Inclusive RSE recognises the importance of diversity and difference across a range of identities related to relationships, sex, gender, sexuality and that this diversity is a source of strength and is foundational to a cohesive, fair and equitable society.
LGBTQ+	(LHDTC+) lesbian, gay, bisexual/bi, transgender/trans, queer or questioning. The + refers to other letters that can be added to represent other identities, including non-binary.
Phase	(Cyfnod) In the context of the RSE Code, a phase indicates when that learning would be developmentally appropriate for most learners.
Protected characteristics	(Nodeddion Gwarchoddedig) age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity.

Relationships	(Cydbberthnasau) can be interpersonal and intrapersonal. Interpersonal relationships refers to the connections and interactions between two or more people. Intrapersonal relationships refers to the relationship that one has with oneself. Both types are inextricably linked, shifting and changing over time. They can be familial, spiritual, romantic, platonic and sexual.
Sex	(Rhyw) attributed to a person on the basis of primary sex characteristics (genitalia) and reproductive functions.
Sexuality	(Rhywioldeb) a central aspect of being human and encompasses sexual orientation, gender identities and roles, sex, reproduction and intimacy. Sexuality is experienced and expressed through thoughts, beliefs, behaviours and relationships.
Violence against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence	(Trais yn erbyn menywod, cam-drin domestig a thrais rhywiol) RSE, while fostering positive attitudes and behaviours, may also give learners space to explore the features of unhealthy relationships.
Whole school approach	(Dull Ysgol Gyfan) the effective linking of all elements of a school's curriculum, policy, staff, community, services and environment. It encourages the communication and reinforcement of a consistent positive ethos and provides holistic high quality support for learners. This includes how RSE forms part of the approach to physical, mental and emotional health and well-being.

## Legislation summary - RSE

### RSE Code

RSE is a mandatory element of the Curriculum for Wales Framework and a curriculum must accord with the RSE Code. This means **schools** and **settings** must include the learning set out in the Code. A curriculum does not encompass RSE unless it accords with the provision in the RSE Code. Learning and teaching also does not encompass the mandatory element of RSE unless it accords with the provision in the RSE Code.

The RSE Code is set out and signposted in the [RSE section](#) of the Framework guidance.

This Code is issued under section 8 of the Act.

### RSE guidance

The RSE section of the framework guidance also includes guidance on developing RSE within a curriculum and how to implement it. This is statutory guidance and is issued under section 71 of the Act. Those responsible for designing and developing a curriculum must read and **have regard** to this guidance when designing it.

Under the Act, this guidance is statutory for the following:

- the head teacher of a maintained school or a maintained nursery school
- the governing body of a maintained school or a maintained nursery school
- a provider of funded non-maintained nursery education
- the teacher in charge of a pupil referral unit
- the management committee for a pupil referral unit
- a person who provides teaching and learning for a child, otherwise than at a maintained school, maintained nursery school or pupil referral unit (**EOTAS**)
- a local authority in Wales.

As outlined in section 50 of the Act, EOTAS settings must include provision for teaching and learning that encompasses RSE, and this must be developmentally appropriate.

RSE is best realised drawing on partnerships with a wide range of people and organisations. It therefore may also be useful for businesses; communities; public sector charitable and voluntary organisations and others who work in partnership with schools and settings. It also includes information that parents and carers are likely to find useful.

## **Pluralistic requirement**

In all schools and settings, RSE must be objective, critical, and pluralistic as to its content and manner of teaching (see the case of 'Dojan and Others v. Germany 2011 application no. 319/08'). By pluralistic we mean that where questions of values are concerned, schools and settings must provide a range of views on a given subject, commonly held within society. This also means providing a range of factual information on RSE issues. In all schools, where they explore specific beliefs or views, this must include a range of other faith and non religious views on the issue.

For example, schools may include learning about current tensions, disagreements or debates within society, or they may explore different perspectives within faiths on issues. Developing this pluralism is important in ensuring learners develop as informed citizens who are aware of and sensitive to a range of different opinions, values and beliefs. This supports them to engage with and navigate potential tensions.

A good understanding of learners' views, emerging values and backgrounds is central to developing this pluralism. Positive relationships with wider communities can help to create a constructive context for exploring aspects and tensions in a sensitive way.

## **Children's rights**

Children Rights under the [UNCRC](#) are central to all of the Welsh Government's work, in line with its commitments and duty to have due regard to the UNCRC in all that it does.

Schools and settings can also link learning to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ([UNCRPD](#)).

Schools and settings are also encouraged to effectively link learning where appropriate to the Public Sector Equality Duty (2010); and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act (2015).

## **Equality Act 2010**

Schools are required to comply with relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

In particular, schools and other settings should note that compliance with the public sector equality duty is a legal requirement for local authority maintained schools (including PRUs) in Wales and makes good educational sense to comply with it. The public sector equality duty helps schools to focus on key issues of concern and how to improve outcomes for all learners. The duty includes identifying where we can take action to advance equality of opportunity, eliminate discrimination and foster good relations, and where possible, mitigate negative impacts which may result from decisions.

In all schools and settings teaching should reflect the law (including the Equality Act 2010) as it applies to relationships, so that learners clearly understand what the law allows and does not allow, and the wider legal implications of decisions they may make.

Under the provisions of the Equality Act, schools must not unlawfully discriminate against learners on the basis of their age, sex, race, disability, religion or belief, gender reassignment, pregnancy or maternity, marriage or civil partnership, or sexual orientation (collectively known as the **protected characteristics**). Schools must also make reasonable adjustments to alleviate disadvantage.

Provisions within the Equality Act 2010 allow schools to take positive action, where it can be shown that it is proportionate, to deal with particular disadvantages affecting one group because of a protected characteristic. This should be taken into consideration in designing and teaching RSE.

Schools should consider the makeup of their own body of learners, including their gender and age range, and consider whether it is appropriate or necessary to put in place additional support for learners with particular protected characteristics (which mean that they are potentially at greater risk). Schools should consider what they can do to foster healthy and respectful peer-to-peer communication and behaviour between learners, and provide an environment, which challenges perceived limits based on their gender or any other characteristic, including through these subjects and as part of a whole-school approach.

### **Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015**

The Welsh Government passed the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015. The 2015 Act provides a focus on violence against women and girls by requiring persons exercising functions (local authority and Local Health Board) under the Act (defined in section 2(2) of that Act as “relevant functions”), to have regard to the need to remove or minimise factors which increase the risk, or exacerbate the impact on victims, of violence against women and girls. However, a person exercising relevant functions must also have regard to all other relevant matters. In so doing the Welsh Government has sought to raise awareness of these issues and to impose functions on those strategic bodies to have a plan to remove or minimise such behaviours.

Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence touches many lives. This has particularly serious implications for learners, as victims themselves, in households where domestic abuse plays a part. It can impact on their safety, mental and physical health and general well-being. It affects family and peer relationships, and potential to enjoy healthy, happy, respectful relationships in the future; and it can impact on current and future educational attainment.

There will be learners and staff within schools who are currently experiencing, or at risk of using, abusive behaviour against women, domestic abuse or sexual violence, or have done so in the past. Schools and settings should be responsible for making sure their learners and staff are safe and healthy.

The Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (Wales) Act 2015 presents an opportunity to lead the way on prevention work in Wales. Educational settings provide an environment where positive attitudes towards gender equality and healthy, respectful relationships can be fostered through a rights-based approach.

Adopting a whole-school approach that includes preventative education within, and which also involves the wider community is vital.

The Welsh Government's Whole Education Approach to Violence against Woman, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence in Wales: Good Practice Guide was developed in conjunction with Welsh Women's Aid. It is intended to be a [practical and useful toolkit](#) for embedding principles of a whole education approach to address violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. It recognises the importance of education settings being environments where positive attitudes towards gender equality and healthy, respectful relationships can be fostered.

The Welsh Government has also published [practical guidance for school governors](#) on the need to develop a policy on violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence; how to recognise indicators of abuse and where to get support for themselves, their colleagues or their learners.

## Relevant links

[Well-being of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act \(2015\).](#)

Safeguarding - Welsh Government guidance on [Keeping learners safe](#)

[Guidance for education settings on peer sexual abuse, exploitation and harmful sexual behaviour](#)

[Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence: guidance for governors | GOV.WALES \(2016\)](#)

[Rights, respect, equality: Statutory guidance for governing bodies of maintained schools 2019](#)

[Sharing nudes and semi-nudes: Responding to incidents and safeguarding children and young people - Keeping safe online - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

## **How each Area contributes to RSE**

### **Expressive arts**

The expressive arts are a powerful medium to explore and express feelings, thoughts, views and experiences on a range of RSE themes. The creative process inherent within the expressive arts can provide a safe, inclusive and innovative environment for learners to explore, articulate and reflect on experiences and feelings that they may not share in other approaches. This can help practitioners to understand learners' knowledge about RSE as well as their learning needs, their questions and what matters to them.

Like literature, expressive arts also provides an opportunity to consider how different RSE themes have been explored, presented and communicated, throughout history and in different cultures and societies.

This learning also helps their understanding of how the expressive arts shape our ideas and feelings and provide insight and understanding of others' experiences and perspectives.

### **Health and well-being**

Health and well-being is of course central to RSE. The Area provides an important platform for learning about healthy relationships; how social norms and influences shape our perceptions of relationships and sexuality; the implications of relationships and sexuality on our physical health and mental and emotional well-being; as well as decision making in the context of relationships and sex. This supports learners to develop personal skills and strategies that enable them to become healthy and well throughout their lives. The Area also gives learners opportunities to consider how issues relating to RSE connect to wider issues around health and well-being: how relationships and sexuality are influenced by wider health and well-being and likewise, how relationships and sexuality impact on our wider health and well-being.

### **Maths and Numeracy**

Maths and numeracy can have an important role in promoting inclusivity and avoiding stereotypes through chosen examples, case studies and scenarios. It can also provide important role models of diverse gender and sexuality who have made important contributions to maths. Statistics and numeracy can also be used to develop and understanding of statistical data used to build evidence on equalities and inequalities, for example around pay or career choices.

## **Humanities**

This Area provides an important opportunity for learners to understand how societal understandings of relationships, sex, gender and sexuality have changed over time and how they continue to evolve. Exploring RSE through the humanities can inspire learners to deepen their understanding of key issues and develop the skills to interpret ideas and presentations about RSE throughout history and across different cultures and contexts around the world. For example, this could consider how norms and perceptions of LGBTQ+ people have changed over time. It also supports them to engage critically with information, to understand the basis of information presented as fact, and make critical judgements about how to use and respond to the knowledge sources available to them.

This Area also offers learners opportunities to explore human rights, values, ethics, philosophies, religious views relating to relationships and sexuality. This provides learners with important opportunities to discuss, explore and develop understanding of different perspectives on RSE issues, shaped by religious and non-religious worldviews, ethical challenges and social inclusion issues. This also supports learners to understand and navigate the tensions between different perspectives. This can also support learners to engage critically with local, national and global RSE issues in both the past and present, helping them to become ethical, informed citizens and ready to play a full part in life and work.

## **Language, literacy and communication**

Speaking, listening, responding and building empathy are skills that are fundamental to all RSE issues, including friendship building, seeking advice and in future, developing healthy sexual relationships. This Area also presents opportunities for learners to make sense of what they hear, read, see and feel when they engage with literature, different media and the world around them. This includes the ability to analyse and explore in a range of media, style and genres. In the context of RSE this could include exploring body images or relationship stereotypes in cartoons, films, poetry, fiction, documentaries and increasingly digital platforms of communication and storytelling.

This Area also enables learners' to experience and respond to a range of often challenging and sensitive RSE topics as listeners, viewers, readers, narrators and creators. As such, it has the potential to offer safe, inclusive and creative ways to explore RSE topics from diverse cultural and linguistic perspectives. Learners can consider how key RSE themes are explored in literature and shaped by language. This can help learners to start to think critically about how relationship, gender, sexual identity and body norms play out in different cultures and communities, including their own. Exploring RSE through literature can also help learners develop awareness and understanding of diversity and difference.

## **Science and technology**

Science and technology provides learners with information about human biology, life cycles and reproduction but it also offers important contributions beyond this. This area can support learners to ask questions and question how things work, which supports their engagement in RSE.

This Area also supports learners to assess data and sources around RSE, critically understand the basis of information presented as fact, and make critical judgements about how to use and respond to the knowledge sources and data available to them.

This Area also supports learners to engage with digital technologies, to understand how they work and to recognise the broad legal, social and ethical consequences in uses of technology. This is vital in enabling learners to make safe and ethical decisions when using technology to form friendships, build communities, explore their identity and engage in romantic and sexual relationships in the future. This also provides opportunities to explore how computation, algorithms and data processing shape perceptions of bodies, relationships, gender and sexuality.