

**Warwickshire RSHE Network: Education Guidance**

Summary of: “Teaching Relationships Education to Prevent Sexual Abuse”

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**Summary: "Teaching Relationships Education to Prevent Sexual Abuse**"

Research Report-DFE Government Social Research

This comprehensive report highlights the importance of a whole-school approach in delivering Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to prevent sexual abuse. It emphasises the role of RSE in teaching consent, healthy relationships, and respect for personal boundaries, with a focus on creating safe and inclusive environments for all students. The findings build on Ofsted’s 2021 review of sexual abuse in schools, aiming to equip students with the knowledge and skills to identify and prevent abusive behaviors.

**Key Findings**

**Whole-School Approach**: Effective RSE requires coordination across school practices, including curriculum design, school policies, and engagement with parents and the community. Whole-school approaches foster inclusive cultures that support anti-bullying efforts and help prevent gender-based violence.

**Consent and Privacy Education:** Students need clear, age-appropriate education on consent, boundaries, and privacy rights. Teaching consent from an early stage, with increased depth in secondary school, helps students understand and respect personal boundaries.

**Safe Learning Environment**: Students benefit from safe spaces and anonymous methods to ask questions, enabling more open discussions on sensitive topics. Drama, literature, and visual arts can facilitate engagement while providing emotional distance for students.

**Inclusion and Support for Diverse Identities**: Inclusive RSE supports the needs of LGBTQ+ students and those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). A safe school climate that acknowledges and respects diversity can reduce bullying and create a supportive learning environment for all.

**External Resources and Parental Involvement**: Collaboration with external experts and open communication with parents support the effectiveness of RSE. This partnership allows for diverse perspectives and reinforces RSE messages outside the classroom.

**Rights-Based Approach:** Framing RSE through human rights and equality empowers students to make informed decisions and develop self-awareness in relationships. Rights-based RSE supports positive attitudes towards self-determination and mutual respect.

**Teaching Consent in Context**: Consent education should challenge gender stereotypes and consider social dynamics that influence behaviour. Real-life scenarios and examples help students apply consent principles to everyday interactions.

**Recommendations**

**Early Introduction of Consent Concepts:** Teaching permission and privacy from early years builds a foundation for understanding consent, empathy, and respect as students grow.

**Inclusive Curriculum Design:** RSE should reflect diverse identities and experiences, addressing LGBTQ+ inclusion and supporting SEND students. Using relatable examples across a range of identities enhances relevance and engagement.

**Teacher Training:** Educators need training on sensitive topics, RSE pedagogy, and how to create safe learning environments. Consistent training helps teachers handle complex discussions confidently.

**Ongoing Student Engagement:** Involving students in curriculum design ensures that RSE addresses their needs and interests, enhancing its relevance and impact.

**Continuous Reinforcement Across Curriculum**: A longer, sequential approach to RSE—integrated into various subjects—supports deeper learning and consistent reinforcement of positive relationship values.

**Moving Forward**

The report advocates for a coordinated, inclusive, and rights-based approach to RSE. By prioritising training, engaging students, and parents, and adopting a whole-school approach, schools can create a learning environment that not only educates students about healthy relationships but also actively contributes to preventing sexual abuse.