

Relationships, Sex and Health Education consultation

July 2024

Department for Education

Context

This consultation seeks feedback on proposed revisions to the Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education statutory guidance 2019. This review is an opportunity to ensure that the guidance:

- covers all essential curriculum content;
- supports high quality teaching which is inclusive and meets the needs of pupils;
- supports schools to develop an open and positive relationship with parents, complementing the role of parents as the primary educators of their children.

Questions we are answering

There are a number of additional areas that we propose adding to the statutory guidance following submissions from other government departments, stakeholders and experts.

These include: • Loneliness • New content on gambling • Prevalence of 'deepfakes' • Antimicrobial resistance • Healthy behaviours during pregnancy • Illegal online behaviours including drug and knife supply • Personal safety, including road, railway and water safety • Vaping, • Menstrual and gynaecological health including endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), heavy menstrual bleeding • Parenting and early years brain development • Virginity testing and hymenoplasty • Bereavement

49. Do you agree with this additional content?

Yes

No

50. If you have any comments to explain your answer, please do so here Please try to limit your response to under 250 words. Please do not add any details which may easily identify you or your organisation.

We welcome the fact that bereavement is included as an additional topic proposed to be added to the statutory guidance.

It is essential that bereavement education is mandatory in all schools. A 2019 evidence review found that following a bereavement children can experience 'psychological, physical, health, social, cultural and educational challenges.'¹ It found that supportive schools can play a key role in reducing these

¹ Consequences of childhood bereavement in the context of the British school system. <https://winstonswish.org/about-us/research/>

impacts, but few schools have planned responses to bereavement and teachers are unsure how to best support children. Additional research has revealed this lack of support, the 2022 UK Commission on Bereavement found that 49% of children who responded said they were only a little or not at all supported at school following a bereavement.²

Many students and parents believe that bereavement education is important and can be helpful.³ Polling from 2024 found that 61% of primary school parents and 76% of secondary school parents agreed that bereavement education 'could offer bereaved children an opportunity to seek support, or a safe environment to talk about their feelings about bereavement.'⁴

Ensuring that all schools teach their students about bereavement and that teachers are well equipped to talk about bereavement can help students to feel more supported and can help them to feel more confident in supporting their classmates.

It is disappointing that this consultation does not contain any guidance around bereavement content. Across society many are not equipped to talk about grief, highlighting the importance of good guidance on bereavement education.

This guidance should mandate the following topics are included in bereavement education:

- how everyone can grieve in different ways
- how students can support someone who has been bereaved
- where bereaved students can receive support from
- how practices around death/ funerals/ bereavement vary from culture to culture.

Guidance must be co-produced with bereavement organisations and students who have experienced bereavement while at school.

51. Is there anything else in the draft statutory guidance that you would like to comment on? Please try to limit your response to under 250 words. Please do not add any details which may easily identify you or your organisation.

Death and health literacy must be taught in schools.

Most of us will become ill in our lifetime and we will all experience the death of someone close to us. Many will receive palliative care or will have a loved one need this care.

There is a lack of knowledge about palliative care amongst the public⁵ and fear and stigma around death prevents people getting the help they need. For example, many are unaware of the care that hospices provide or are afraid of them, and therefore may not access hospice care when they need it most.

² https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/media/jaqex1t5/bereavement-is-everyone-s-business-full-report_1.pdf

³ ⁹ <https://bereavementcommission.org.uk/>

⁴ https://www.mariecurie.org.uk/globalassets/media/documents/policy/policy-publications/2024/paddukgriefedsummaryreport200224_v9_final_.pdf

⁵ <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/news/65-of-adults-are-worried-about-access-to-palliative-care#:~:text=Findings%20from%20the%20survey%20conducted,White%20and%20ethnic%20minority%20groups.>

It is important that people's death literacy is improved and topics related to ill health are taught in school as anyone can be affected by these issues. For example:

- Estimates suggest that 26,900 parents die each year in the UK, leaving dependent children.⁶
- There are 120,000 carers aged 5-17 in England.⁷
- There are 49,000 children aged 0-18 living with a life-limiting or life-threatening condition in the UK.⁸

School aged children are being affected by terminal illness, ill health and death, so schools must play a key role in helping to equip students to cope with and understand these difficult topics.

The recent House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee report on Assisted Dying /Assisted Suicide⁹ recommended that the government should establish a national strategy for death literacy. We support this recommendation and believe that educating people about how to cope with illnesses should start in school.

The public need to be more health literate so that they:

- can stay healthy as long as possible
- know how to help themselves when they are ill
- know where to get help when needed
- know how to support others with illnesses
- can build their understanding of types of care, what they would want if they become ill and what options there are around where people can receive care

In order to achieve this, the Death Literacy Index must be run in the UK, and in particular in schools. According to the British Medical Journal this index 'can be used to determine levels of death literacy across multiple contexts, including at a community/national level, and to evaluate the outcome of different public health interventions.'¹⁰ This can identify specific gaps in knowledge and determine the content that it is most important to include in curriculums.

⁶ <https://childhoodbereavementnetwork.org.uk/about/media-centre/evidence/key-statistics>

⁷ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/socialcare/articles/unpaidcarebyagesexanddeprivationenglandandwales/census2021>

⁸ <https://www.togetherforshortlives.org.uk/app/uploads/2018/01/ProRes-How-Many-Children-Young-People-Affected-By-A-Life-Limiting-or-Life-Threatening-Condition-Factsheet.pdf>

⁹ <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43582/documents/216484/default/>

¹⁰ https://spcare.bmj.com/content/12/Suppl_1/A14.1