

Let the government know your views about its plans for sex and relationships education

Please respond to the Department for Children, Schools and Families consultation on sex and relationships education guidance

The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) is conducting a public consultation on draft sex and relationships education guidance. The consultation period will conclude on **Monday 19 April**.

It is intended that new guidance will be issued in September 2010 in place of the existing guidance which was published in July 2000.¹

This briefing is intended to offer guidance in responding to the PSHE questionnaire. The Family Education Trust booklet, ***Too Much, Too Soon***, will provide further background material. Printed copies of ***Too Much, Too Soon*** may be purchased from Family Education Trust or downloaded from our website at www.famyouth.org.uk

How to respond

You can access the draft guidance by selecting the link to the consultation on **Sex and Relationships Education Guidance** towards the foot of the DCSF consultation home page at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/>

There are three ways to respond.

- 1. Online** You can respond online by clicking on the following link:
<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm?action=Respond&consultationId=1637&menu=1>
- 2. By email** You can download and complete the questionnaire from the DCSF website and then email it to: SREGuidance.CONSULTATION@dcsf.gsi.gov.uk
- 3. By post** You can print off the response form from the DCSF website and post your completed form to: Consultation Unit, Area 1A, Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ.

¹ Department for Education and Employment, Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, Ref DfEE 0116/2000, July 2000 <http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/DfES-0116-2000%20SRE.pdf>

THE QUESTIONS

Q1) Does the introduction clearly set out the importance of SRE?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

● **The draft guidance states:** *Effective SRE is important to ensure that children grow up able to enjoy the positive benefits of loving, rewarding and responsible relationships, to be informed, comfortable with the changes during puberty, sexually healthy and emotionally safe.*

There is no evidence that the type of sex and relationships education outlined in the draft guidance will achieve these objectives. See chapter 5 of *Too Much, Too Soon* (pages 23-27).

● **The draft guidance states:** *Schools provide a safe place for children and young people to make sense of the information they have picked up from the media and also playground myths.*

This is not necessarily the case. Within a school classroom setting, there is a very real danger that children and young people will be introduced to concepts and behaviours that are alien to their experience and could be disturbing to them. For most children the family provides a safer environment in which to learn about sex and relationships, not necessarily by means of formal instruction, but by means of observing healthy family relationships and imbibing positive attitudes.

● **The draft guidance states** that a major objective of SRE is to help young people ‘*develop the skills they need to make safe and responsible choices*’.

The only truly safe and responsible choice in relation to sexual conduct is to confine it to a lifelong, mutually faithful relationship between one man and one woman, normally signified by marriage. Outside this context, sexual intimacy always carries risks and is neither safe nor responsible. However, the draft guidance makes no reference to the importance of faithful lifelong marriage as the primary means of ensuring optimal sexual health.

● **The draft guidance states:** *It is important that children start to build up the vocabulary and confidence to talk openly and positively about emotions, relationships and their bodies. Learning the words to describe feelings and emotions, the correct terms for parts of the body and developing “health literacy” is vital for children to stay safe and seek help if they feel at risk or are being harmed.*

Introducing sex education at an early age runs the risk of breaking down children’s natural sense of reserve. Far from being a hindrance, children’s natural inhibitions and sense of modesty in talking about sexual matters are healthy and provide a necessary safeguard against both sexual abuse and casual attitudes towards sexual intimacy later on. See chapter 6 of *Too Much, Too Soon* (pages 28-30).

- **The draft guidance claims** that there is a need for pupils to ‘clarify and strengthen their own values’ and to ‘identify and reflect on their own values’.

The term ‘values clarification’ means that there is no such thing as objective right and wrong, but that pupils must decide what is right ‘for them’. See chapter 11 of *Too Much, Too Soon*, for why we need to give young people clear moral direction (pages 46-47).

- **The draft guidance places a strong emphasis** on schools consulting pupils about what they want to learn in SRE classes.

Two thirds (67 per cent) of respondents to the government’s public consultation on PSHE education in 2009 disagreed with the proposition that ‘A school’s governing body should consult pupils, at secondary level, when developing its sex and relationship education policy’, and less than a third supported it. The idea that children and young people should have an influence in determining the character of the sex education they receive may sound very reasonable at first glance, but it involves a subtle undermining of parental responsibility. See chapter 10 of *Too Much, Too Soon* (pages 40-43).

Q2) Does Section 2 clearly describe SRE? If not, what do you think is missing?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

- **The draft guidance makes several references** to equipping children and young people to make ‘informed decisions and life choices’.

This is an inadequate and unworthy goal because it allows for young people under the age of consent to make the ‘informed choice’ of engaging in unlawful intercourse just as much as it allows them to make an ‘informed choice’ to wait. It is not ‘informed choices’ we should be aiming for, but wise, moral and lawful choices, and there is certainly no evidence that contraceptive-based sex education achieves that.

- **The draft guidance states** that ‘the value of family life, marriage and of loving and stable relationships in bringing up children’ is one of the ‘clear values that underpin SRE’.

Throughout the document it is assumed that marriage is no different from any other 'loving and stable relationship', whereas research consistently shows that married families provide a far more stable environment for the raising of children than unmarried families, even after other factors such as age, income, education and race have been taken into account. It is inaccurate to give young people the impression that unmarried relationships are associated with the same level of commitment and stability as marriage.

- **The draft guidance includes** '*acceptance of diversity*' as another of the values that underpin SRE.

The term acceptance of diversity is frequently used in connection with the promotion of homosexuality as a normal and natural lifestyle. Many parents will be appalled at the idea of SRE being used to present positive images of homosexual lifestyles. See *Too Much, Too Soon*, pages 12-13, 28-29.

- **The draft guidance suggests** that secondary school pupils should learn '*the importance of respect and consent in intimate relationships*'.

This is inadequate. In addition to respect and consent, young people need to learn about the importance of lifelong commitment and fidelity.

- **The draft guidance asserts** that '*SRE should start in primary schools*'.

There is a lack of any supporting evidence to demonstrate positive outcomes for SRE at primary school level and it does not command widespread public support. See chapter 6 of *Too Much, Too Soon* (pages 28-30).

- **The draft guidance claims** that: '*The evidence is conclusive that SRE does not increase rates of sexual activity or sexual experimentation in young people.*'

The evidence for the effectiveness of SRE is far from conclusive and there is no warrant for the sweeping claim that programmes with a focus on abstinence do not have a positive impact on the sexual behaviour of young people. See chapter 5 of *Too Much, Too Soon* (pages 23-27).

- **The draft guidance claims** that '*there is a broad consensus and support for SRE in schools*'.

However, in spite of a concerted campaign on the part of the sex education lobby, over two-thirds (68 per cent) of respondents to the government's own public consultation exercise in 2009 opposed making Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education, including SRE, a statutory part of the national curriculum. The overwhelming majority (94 per cent) of those opposed to statutory PSHE/SRE 'strongly' disagreed with it being given statutory status.

- **The draft guidance repeatedly asserts** that parents who exercise their legal right to withdraw their children from SRE *'have a responsibility to provide alternative SRE'* and states that schools *'should discuss the alternative arrangements that parents are making to provide SRE themselves'*.

Parents are under no legal obligation to provide SRE to their children and how they address sexual issues in the privacy of their own homes should be of no concern to the school. In most cases where parents withdraw their children from SRE classes it will be because they are not comfortable with the school's moral stance. In such circumstances, parents are unlikely to welcome the school's assistance. See chapter 11 of *Too Much, Too Soon*, (pages 44-48).

- **The draft guidance states** that: *'Schools will need to balance the rights of the parents and the rights of their pupils.'*

The draft guidance appears to assume that the rights of parents and of pupils are in conflict. However, parents and their children constitute a family unit – they are on the same side, not in opposition to each other. The notion of needing to 'balance the rights' of parents and children is a mechanism increasingly being used by government departments to impose their own agendas on children and to undermine parents.

Q3) Is Section 3 helpful in setting out the range of processes that need to be in place and the roles that different partners have in planning and teaching good SRE?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

- **The draft guidance states** that, *'SRE should promote awareness, respect and understanding for the wide range of practices and beliefs relating to sex and relationships within our society.'*

If one of the chief aims of SRE is to promote optimal sexual health, schools cannot present children and young people with a menu of equally legitimate sexual options. Not all sexual practices are equally healthy and therefore not all sexual practices merit equal respect.

- **The draft guidance asserts** that children and young people have a *'right to confidential advice and support on sex and relationships'*.

In reality, children have no such 'right' at all, but the framers of the draft guidance are using the language of rights in an effort to give greater weight to their own ideology. This is an example of the language of children's rights being misused to advance a very adult agenda. The so-called 'right' of the child to confidential sexual advice and support undermines the responsibility of parents to guide and protect their children and must therefore be rejected.

● **The draft guidance envisages** that children aged 11-14 will consider the question, ‘*What choices does a woman have if she gets pregnant, including keeping the baby, abortion and adoption?*’

The question implies that abortion is available on demand when in reality the law specifies that it is an option only within carefully defined circumstances.

● **The draft guidance includes** tables showing the questions to be addressed in SRE lessons at each key stage.

Take a look at the tables on pages 31-36 of the draft guidance with your own child(ren) or other children known to you in mind. Ask yourself whether you would want a teacher, who may or may not share your views on sex and relationships issues, to discuss these questions in a classroom context. You may wish to highlight some of the questions you consider inappropriate for classroom discussion at the ages suggested: Key stage 1 (5-7s), Key stage 2 (7-11s), Key stage 3 (11-14s), Key stage 4 (14-16s).

For example, should children aged 7-11 be introduced to homosexuality and contraception? Should 11-14 year-olds be told where they can access contraception and the morning-after pill, and should they be invited to consider ‘the different ways of expressing sexual intimacy’? And should 14-16 year-olds be encouraged to ask, ‘What sexual and reproductive rights do I have as a young person (including rights relating to information, healthcare, confidentiality and the law)?’ or ‘What is the full range of services, help and information available to me including local contraception and sexual health services, counselling, pharmacists, GPs, drop-in services for young people, telephone help-lines and internet sites?’

● **The draft guidance suggests** that schools may wish to ‘*brigade SRE content under the five key concepts*’ of ‘*personal identities, healthy lifestyles, risk, relationships and diversity*’.

There are other concepts that are even more fundamental – concepts such as marriage, modesty, fidelity and self-restraint. Marriage receives only passing mention alongside ‘loving and stable relationships’, whereas modesty, fidelity and self-restraint do not feature at all.

● **The draft guidance states** that school governors should consider how they ‘*communicate with parents about SRE*’, but they should ‘*regularly consult children and young people about SRE*’ and take account of their views.

In common with other parts of the draft guidance, there is a much stronger emphasis on listening to children than listening to parents. ‘Communication’ could simply be a matter of the school advising parents of its SRE policy, without taking into account their views and concerns.

Q4) Is Section 4 helpful in describing how the whole-school should be involved in SRE?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

• **The draft guidance suggests** that a school's approach to SRE is most effective when '*pupils' needs and views are taken into account when developing programmes and policies*'.

Once again the document appears to have lost sight of the fact that schools exist to serve parents who bear the legal responsibility for their children's education.

Q5) Is Section 5 helpful in describing what can be used for teaching SRE?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

The checklist for selecting teaching materials/resources reflects the relativistic approach of the whole draft guidance. It makes no reference to ensuring that resources promote modesty, self-restraint, marriage or fidelity, which in turn will contribute to stable family life and supportive communities. It is important that resources do not blur gender distinctives and adequately recognise gender differences.

Q6) Are the messages in the guidance clear, workable, and good enough to be put into practice?

Yes

X No

Not Sure

You may wish to briefly recap on some of points made in response to the previous questions.



Too Much, Too Soon: The government's plans for your child's sex education
by Norman Wells

This 52-page booklet explains the law as it stands, identifies the aims of the key players, considers the research evidence, and weighs up the case for making sex education compulsory for all pupils from the age of five. It argues that young people do not need to be presented with a menu of sexual options from which they can make 'informed choices'. Rather, the whole issue needs to be approached with honesty, modesty and within a clear moral framework that shows a proper respect for parents and for marriage.

Prices (inc p&p): single copy - £3.50; 5 copies - £12.50; 10 copies - £22.50; 25 copies - £50.00.

There are seven additional questions that you may wish to address, but there is no need to respond to every question if you do not wish to do so.

Q7) What do you think would be the best ways of getting these messages to young people and parents?

Q8) What are the particular issues the guidance needs to add/highlight?

Q9a) Is the appendix provided in the guidance useful?

Q9b) Would you like the contents to be part of the guidance or left as an appendix?

Q10) What extra appendices are needed?

Q11) Case studies have been included. Are they enough or do we need to cover other areas?

Q12) Do you have a case study you would like to send us? If so please let us know the subject and provide contact details.

Q13) If you have further comments to make on the content of this draft or on how we might publish and circulate the final document, please give them below.

Deadline for responses: Monday 19 April 2010.

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