PDST
Professional Development Service for Teachers | An tSeirbhís um Fhorbairt Ghairmiúil do Mhúinteoirí

# RELATIONSHIP AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOL - TIPS FOR PARENTS

## WHAT IS RSE?

**Relationships & Sexuality education (RSE)** is a key component of the Social Personal & Health Education (S.P.H.E.) curriculum in primary school. RSE provides children with opportunities to develop knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and practical skills necessary to establish and sustain healthy personal relationships with self and others. In addition to learning about relationships, RSE invites children to explore concepts such as physical development and human sexuality. Topics are explored with children in a developmentally appropriate, spiral nature throughout their primary education. Topics addressed in RSE include exploration of feelings, friendships, inclusive families, puberty, pregnancy and conception. If you would like to view the RSE curriculum, teaching documents and resources, please do so on the following link by the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) https://www.pdst.ie/primary/healthwellbeing/RSE

## WHY TEACH RSE?

As a parent, you are the primary educator of your child. Just as you help your child to grow and develop in other ways, consciously supporting the development of your child's sexuality education will help them achieve the skills, attitudes and values they need in order to have healthy relationships with themselves and others. Research tells us that sexuality education has a positive impact on young peoples' sexual health knowledge and their related behaviours. (UNESCO 2018) Recent Irish research would suggest that in general parents feel that RSE is an important topic to discuss with their children at home. However, many parents feel ill equipped to do this effectively. (Conlon 2018) So having accurate and age appropriate conversations with your child can help them develop healthy behaviours in relation to sexuality and sex. This article highlights tips and resources you can use to aid you in this instance.

# TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT RSE

## 1. Start early and use correct anatomical language

Open communication is the cornerstone of quality RSE education. As with other topics, it is best to use naturally occurring 'teachable moments' to talk to your child about sexuality. It could be as simple as using correct anatomical language (penis & vulva) when labelling genitals in the bathtub instead of alternative informal names. By teaching your child correct terminology early, you are creating an environment for open, healthy and positive communication about the body. In Irish primary schools, the anatomically correct language is covered in the Junior/ Senior Infant SPHE and Science curricula. Many infant teachers teach this language through the following activity which you can try at home too!

### Give the doll a bath!

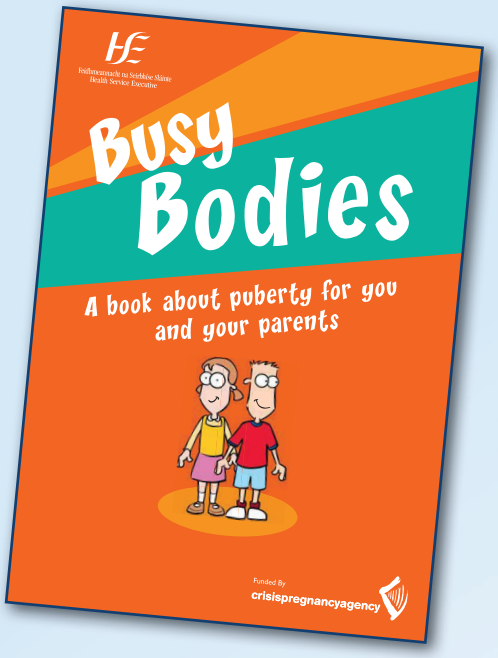
You will need to use anatomically correct dolls, (available online and in toy shops) a toy bath and bath time accoutrements. Name all the body parts as you wash them. Encourage your child to do the same. Follow up this activity by reading 'Tom's Flower Power' with your child. This story highlights the anatomically correct terminology as the teacher washes the baby in the story. The book comes with an information booklet designed specifically for parents called 'Talking to Your Young Child about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up' and it is available to download or order for free on www.healthpromotion.ie.

## 2. Keep it simple and honest

Keep your answers simple and to the point. Avoid over-explaining. Afterall, if your child wants to hear more, they will ask. The following link gives developmentally appropriate responses to some of the questions you could be asked;
https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-parents/sample-questions-and-answers/

## 3. Dealing with the 'tricky' questions

When answering 'tricky' questions, ask your child clarifying questions first to see what they already know before giving them additional information. If you're not sure how to answer straight away, tell them you will get back to them later with the answer. It's really important that you then answer their question as soon as you can afterwards.




## 4. Talking about puberty and sexual intercourse

Busy Bodies is a free online HSE resource to help you when talking to your older child about puberty and sexual intercourse. It consists of a series of videos with an accompanying booklet and it can be accessed on the following link;
https://www.healthpromotion.ie/health/inner/busy_bodies

## 5. Teach your child body ownership.

It is important to teach your child that their body belongs to them and that they don't have to let anybody touch them in a way that makes them feel unsafe or uncomfortable. This is the very beginning of teaching your child about consent. In school, we use the Stay Safe programme to teach this message and you can access this programme on the following link:
https://www.pdst.ie/staysafe

## 6. Teach facts.

Talk to your child about your own beliefs and opinions on sexuality matters, including what makes a healthy relationship.

## 7. Listen to your child. Be a 'tellable' parent.

The key to good communication is listening. Your child will know if you're not fully tuned into what they are saying. Take time to sit or walk with them and listen to what they have to say, particularly when they are discussing their anxieties, concerns or fears.

## 8. You are not alone! Reach out and seek support

Connect with family members or friends who have children of a similar age or older. They may have useful tips to share with you. Then decide on the advice you deem most appropriate for you and your child. Connect with your child's school for support. You will be able to find your school's RSE policy on the school website. Talk to your child's teacher if you have any particular concerns. They will be able to offer you support and signpost you to other useful resources to help.

# NEW RESOURCE FOR PARENTS!

*(Department of Health 2020 'Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks)*

This free resource for parents/ carers was created in conjunction with Libraries Ireland. The purpose of this booklet is to provide you with suggested topics you might like to discuss with your child at particular ages. It signposts you to free library books that would be most beneficial to aid these discussions at home.

All resources referenced in this booklet are available free to borrow through the public library network. To order a copy of this resource in English and Irish please click on the following link: https://www.healthpromotion.ie/publication/fullListing?category=&searchHSE=big+talk&x=0&y=0

For information on library locations and all the services available, see www.librariesireland.ie

## Check out some additional resources to help you at home

| ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS | |
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| **https://www.pdst.ie/primary/healthwellbeing/RSE** | Primary teaching RSE manuals & resources |
| **https://www.pdst.ie/primary/healthwellbeing/distancelearning** | Over 100+ Wellbeing Resources |
| **https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/** | This is the HSE's sexual health website and has a section to help parents talk with their children about relationships, sexuality and growing up. |
| **https://www.pdst.ie/staysafe** | This is the link to the mandatory child abuse prevention and anti-bullying programme called 'Stay Safe'. You will find all the teaching materials and interactive workbooks here. |
| **www.mychild.ie** | This HSE site provides information on all aspects of pregnancy, baby and toddler health including healthy sexuality development. |
| **www.webwise.ie** | This website is part-funded by the Department of Education and Skills and offers advice and information for parents and schools to help them promote online safety to their children and students. |
| **https://www.curriculumonline.ie/Primary/Curriculum-Areas/Social-Personal-and-Health-Education-Curriculum/** | This is the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment website for SPHE. |

| RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN AND/OR ADDITIONAL NEEDS | |
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| **https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/underwear-rule/** | NSPCC: Pants (The Underpants Rule) is a simple, inclusive resource for teaching young children about personal safety. This website contains adapted resources for children with additional needs including videos for children who are deaf. |
| **https://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/HealthyBodies/files/HealthyBodiesAppendix-Boys.pdf** | The Healthy Bodies Toolkit - Puberty Storyboards, Visuals and PECS for Boys with Autism. |
| **https://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/HealthyBodies/files/HealthyBodiesAppendix-Girls.pdf** | The Healthy Bodies Toolkit - Puberty Storyboards, Visuals and PECS for Girls with Autism |

| PARENTING COURSES AND FURTHER SUPPORT | |
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| **www.npc.ie** | National Parents' Council Primary |
| **www.npcpp.ie** | National Parents' Council Post Primary |
| **www.ifpa.ie** | Irish Family Planning Association |
| **www.belongto.ie** | BeLong To Youth Service |
| **www.teni.ie** | Transgender Equality Network Ireland |

Conlon, C. (2018) Supporting Parents Communicating with Children Aged 4-9 Years about Relationships, Sexuality and Growing Up

UNESCO (2018) International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education; WHO (2010) Standards for Sexuality Education in Europe