

Parents and carers have the right to request that their child is withdrawn from any part of sex education that is delivered as part of statutory Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). This applies in both primary and secondary schools, although the rules work slightly differently. In primary schools, if sex education is taught, the headteacher must automatically grant the request unless the material is part of the science national curriculum. In secondary schools, parents and carers can still make a withdrawal request, but the headteacher may refuse it in exceptional circumstances, such as where there are safeguarding concerns.

As pupils get older, they gain more independence in this area. From three terms before a pupil turns 16, they can choose to take part in sex education lessons even if their parent or carer previously withdrew them. Schools must make pupils aware of this right so that they can make an informed decision.

There are several areas of the curriculum from which parents and carers cannot withdraw their child. They cannot withdraw pupils from Relationships Education in primary schools, or from the relationship's elements of RSE in secondary schools. They also cannot withdraw from any part of Health Education. In addition, no pupil can be withdrawn from teaching that forms part of the science national curriculum. This includes learning about puberty, the human body, external body parts, life cycles, and the basic scientific facts about sexual and asexual reproduction. These areas are statutory and must be taught to all pupils.

Sex education refers to teaching that goes beyond the factual, biological content of science and beyond the compulsory relationships and safeguarding content within RSHE. If a lesson covers sexual activity, sexual behaviour, sexual decision-making, pregnancy choices, contraception or sexually transmitted infections, then (even though these themes sit under relationships or health), they may also count as sex education. Parents and carers may therefore request withdrawal from that specific content. At primary level, any teaching about human conception that goes beyond what is required in the science curriculum is also sex education and is withdrawable. In secondary schools, more detailed teaching about sexual relationships, sexual pleasure, readiness for sex, pornography and sexual ethics can also fall within sex education even though they also sit within the wider relationships curriculum.

Working out whether a lesson sits within relationships, sex or health can sometimes be challenging. For example, a lesson about contraception has a clear basis in health education but is also part of sex education. Where there is any uncertainty, or where a lesson may touch on sexual content even briefly, it is helpful for schools to identify these lessons in advance. This ensures the school can explain the content clearly to parents and carers and discuss withdrawal if requested.

Our primary curriculum does not include any sex education content. If a primary school chooses to use any of our KS3 sex education lessons with upper KS2 pupils, they must follow statutory guidance and ensure parents and carers are notified and given the opportunity to withdraw.



The following Pol-Ed lessons include references to sexual activity and could therefore be classified as sex education, even if much of their focus is on relationships or health. These lessons have been identified as those from which a parent or carer may choose to withdraw their child. We recommend familiarising yourself with these lessons so that you feel confident discussing the content with parents and carers, especially where the reference to sexual activity is minimal or sits within a broader relationships or safeguarding context.

Year 7

- What is child-on-child abuse?

Year 9

- How does the media portray sex and relationships?
- What is consent in a relationship?
- What is Child Sexual Exploitation?
- What's the issue with nudes?
- Can I legally get contraception?

Year 10

- What is image-based sexual abuse?
- What is toxic culture?

Year 11

- What is the influence of porn on relationships?
- What are sexual offences?
- What does the law say about contraception?
- What does the law say about pregnancy and STIs?
- Why is understanding gynaecological health important for everyone?
- How might sexual health impact wellbeing?

Want to find out more?

 www.Pol-Ed.co.uk

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