



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. This also forms part of the new Wellbeing curriculum as per the NCCA Primary Curriculum Framework (2023). 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 Oide Primary Wellbeing: <https://oide.ie/primary/home/wellbeing/sphe/resources/>



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 now and in the future.

Research tells us that sexuality education has a positive impact on young people's sexual health knowledge and their related behaviours (UNESCO, 2018). 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). 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

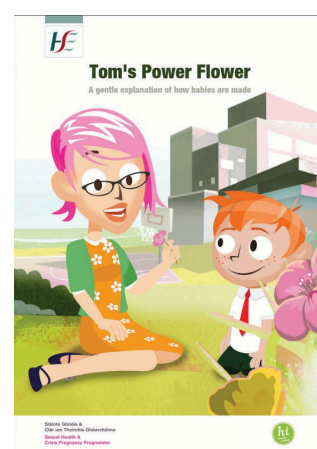
Start early and use correct anatomical language

Open communication is the cornerstone of high quality RSE. 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 a doll a bath

You will need to use anatomically correct dolls (available online and in toy shops), a toy bath and bath time items such as shampoo and sponges. Name all the body parts as you wash them. Encourage your child to do the same.

You could follow up this activity by reading ‘Tom’s Power Flower’ developed for parents by the HSE. This is a story to be read by parents to their children, and explains where babies come from in a developmentally appropriate way.



Keep it simple and honest

Keep your answers simple and to the point. Avoid over-explaining. After all, if your child wants to hear more, they will generally 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/>

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.

Talking about puberty and sexual intercourse

Busy Bodies is a free, online resource developed by the HSE to support you when talking to your older child about puberty, sexual intercourse and growing up. It consists of a series of videos with an accompanying booklet and it can be accessed on the following link:

<https://www.sexualwellbeing.ie/for-parents/busy-bodies-english-language.pdf>

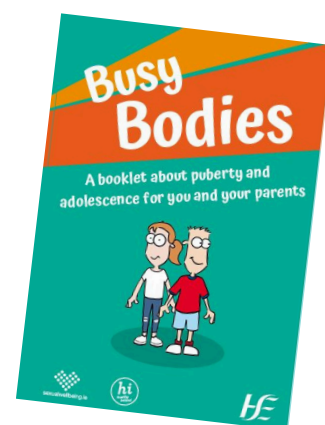
Teach your child body ownership

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:

www.staysafe.ie

Teach facts

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



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 worries, concerns or fears.

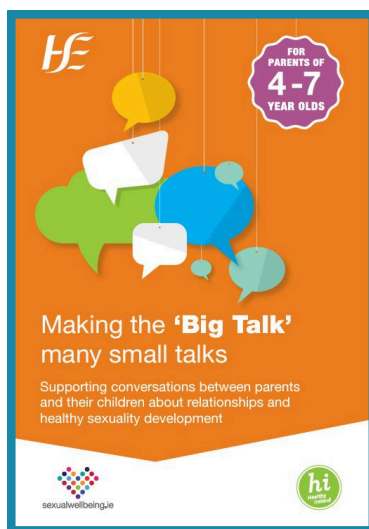
You are not alone! Reach out and seek support

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 may be able to view your school's RSE policy on the school website or you can ask to see it. 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 that may support you.



Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks: video collection

The HSE have created a set of animated videos to support talking through common questions your child might ask about relationships and sexuality. You can access them on the [HSE Health and Wellbeing YouTube channel](#).



Making the 'Big Talk' many small talks - Parent Booklets

These booklets give information to parents wishing to talk to their children about relationships and healthy sexuality development. They can be ordered free of charge from the HSE and accessed on the healthpromotion.ie website.

Parents of children ages 4 - 7:

www.healthpromotion.ie/media/documents/HCP01151_LPZYp79.pdf

Parents of children ages 8 - 12:

www.healthpromotion.ie/media/documents/HCP01380_XT7509C.pdf

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS:

- www.sexualwellbeing.ie - This is the HSE's sexual health website. It has a section to help parents talk with their children about relationships, sexuality and growing up.
- www.staysafe.ie - This is the link to the mandatory child abuse prevention and anti-bullying programme called 'Stay Safe'. You will find all the teaching materials here.
- www2.hse.ie/my-child - 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 offers advice and information for parents and schools to help them promote online safety to their children and students.
- www.curriculumonline.ie/primary/curriculum-areas/social-personal-and-health-education - This is the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment website for SPHE.

RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS:

- <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/pants-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.vumc.org/healthybodies/> - The Vanderbilt Kennedy Centre have created the Healthy Bodies Toolkit for Boys and the Healthy Bodies Toolkit for Girls. The resources in the appendices are similar to PECS and can be used to make social stories and sorting activities. They have been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish and Thai.
- <https://www.middletownautism.com/training/parents> - Middletown Centre for Autism facilitate training for parents on RSE. Keep an eye on the training section of their website to see when the next free course is running.