

Sex and relationships education

Briefing summary: 20 January 2016



SRE is protective

- A Cochrane review (2015) has concluded that 'Children who are taught about preventing sexual abuse at school are more likely than others to tell an adult if they had, or were actually experiencing sexual abuse'.
- Data from the Children's Commissioner Inquiry into child sexual abuse has found that only one in eight victims of sexual abuse come to the attention of statutory authorities (2015).
- The UK 'Natsal-3' study found that people whose main source of information was lessons at school were less likely to have an unplanned pregnancy later in life and first sex was less likely to be against their will (2013, 2015)
- National and international research shows that good quality SRE has a protective function as young people who have had good SRE are more likely to choose to have sex for the first time later.

Gaps in SRE provision

- 50% of the 2000+ young people surveyed by the Sex Education Forum (2016) had not learnt from their primary school about how to get help if you experience unwanted touching / sexual abuse
- 16% had not learnt the correct names for genitalia and 17% had not learnt that the genitals are private to you
- Young people were more likely to have learnt about the difference between safe and unwanted touch from discussions at home than at school, but even so, less than half of young people (45%) said they had learnt about this with a parent or carer.

What needs to be taught at school?

SRE begins with teaching children about appropriate behaviour, safety and basic understanding of their bodies and how families care for them. Five year olds are not taught about how people have sex. At secondary school young people need to add to their learning so that they can recognise when a relationship is healthy or abusive, when behaviour may constitute grooming and vital information about sexual health.

Statutory SRE is needed so that every child is protected

Currently, primary schools can choose whether or not to teach a programme of sex and relationships education. Maintained secondary schools must cover some aspects of SRE, but current Government guidance on what to include dates back to 2000.

There is overwhelming support from teachers, parents, young people and safeguarding experts for a change of legislation to require all schools to teach SRE, and a growing list of politicians are backing the campaign.

For more information visit www.sexeducationforum.org.uk or email Lucy Emmerson, Coordinator, Sex Education Forum, lemmerson@ncb.org.uk Follow us on twitter @sex_ed_forum For research references see [SRE – the evidence](#) and [Heads or Tails?](#)