

# PSHE education and safeguarding — a ‘compelling case’

PSHE education addresses some of the most vital issues in children and young people’s lives, giving them knowledge, skills and attributes that support their safety, mental and physical health and economic wellbeing.

PSHE education is a critical component of safeguarding in schools. The evidence is clear regarding its role in keeping children safe and supporting them to seek help when necessary. For example:

- **A 2017 Public Health England report** on child sexual exploitation (CSE)<sup>i</sup> found that the existing body of evidence *‘repeatedly highlights the critical role of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) and Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in addressing these issues’*.
- **A Cochrane review** (2015) found that *‘children who are taught about preventing sexual abuse at school are more likely to tell an adult if they had, or were actually experiencing sexual abuse’*.
- **Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) Toolkit**<sup>ii</sup> research found that relationship violence prevention lessons and activities can reduce all types of dating and relationship violence, including emotional, physical and sexual violence, and violence that takes place online.
- **The British National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles** (Natsal-3) found that men and women who reported school lessons as their main source of sex education were more likely to have started having sex later and that their ‘first sex’ was more likely to be consensual.<sup>iii</sup>
- **A systematic literature review** of school-based RSE by Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) found strong evidence that it can reduce sexual violence and domestic violence.<sup>iv</sup>

The Department for Education (DfE) recognised PSHE education’s importance to safeguarding when introducing statutory RSHE in 2020, providing the rationale<sup>v</sup> that: *‘Given the increasing concerns around child sexual abuse and exploitation and the growing risks associated with growing up in a digital world, there is a particularly compelling case to act in relation to pupil safety’*.

This important development followed widespread support for statutory PSHE education from a coalition of safeguarding-related bodies and individuals including the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the national police lead for child protection, the Association of Independent Local Safeguarding Children Boards Chairs and others. 92% of parents surveyed by YouGov in 2016 also agreed that the government should ensure all pupils are given PSHE lessons about staying safe<sup>vi</sup>.

## Three key considerations

Approach is everything when it comes to ensuring PSHE education meets its potential in supporting safeguarding. Here are some key considerations:

### 1. Discrete, regular curriculum time:

PSHE education (including RSHE) must be treated as a discrete school curriculum subject and taught regularly in order to sequence learning and build knowledge and understanding as pupils progress through education.

- Statutory Keeping Children Safe In Education (KSCIE) 2022 states that *‘Schools and colleges play a crucial role in preventative education’* and stresses the importance to this of ***‘a planned programme of evidence-based RSHE delivered in regularly timetabled lessons’***

- In their response to concerns about sexual harassment in schools, Ofsted recommended that **'the RSHE curriculum should be carefully sequenced with time allocated for topics that children and young people find difficult, such as consent and sharing explicit images'**<sup>vii</sup>

Activities such as drop-down days, outside speakers, assemblies, tutor time and other curriculum areas can support but must not replace regular PSHE lessons.

## 2. Trained and confident teachers create a safe, effective learning environment:

Anyone teaching PSHE education must have a grounding in the fundamentals of safe, effective practice. This includes being able to guarantee a safe learning environment and create/choose appropriate lessons. Useful guidance includes:

- Our **'safe classroom'** and **'effective teaching'** interactive posters, which summarise key principles of safe, effective PSHE practice<sup>viii</sup>.
- Our **PSHE education lesson planning prompts poster**<sup>ix</sup> – to help you plan effective PSHE education lessons that include all elements of best practice.
- Guidance on handling complex issues and creating a safe learning environment<sup>x</sup>.
- Our range of online and face-to-face CPD training, including on planning and assessing PSHE education as well as addressing individual safeguarding risks such as pornography<sup>xi</sup>.

## 3. Tailored, appropriate provision:

PSHE education must be age and developmentally appropriate and reflect your pupils' particular needs and circumstances.

- Carrying out effective baseline assessment will establish prior knowledge, understanding, skills, beliefs and attitudes and allow you to pitch your PSHE education accordingly. See our comprehensive **guide to assessment**<sup>xii</sup>.
- Also see our **guidance on gathering pupils' views**<sup>xiii</sup> as this will help gauge their priorities and concerns so that you can plan accordingly

Use sources such as local data to identify any safeguarding priorities in your area that would be good to focus on. For example, using ChiMat data<sup>xiv</sup> might establish if substance misuse is a problem in your region, county or borough.

## Useful links

- **Safety Planning in Education**<sup>xv</sup>: a free guide from the Centre of Expertise on child sexual abuse (CSA Centre) specifically for those working in education settings. This guide helps support knowledge and understanding on harmful sexual behaviour, confidently speaking to children and parents or carers and dealing effectively with any incidents which may arise
- **'Addressing misogyny, toxic masculinity and social media influence through PSHE education'**<sup>xvi</sup> our briefing provides an overview of how to equip pupils with the skills and strategies to recognise and challenge discriminatory behaviours and attitudes.
- Our **research briefing outlining safeguarding risks of online pornography and guidance for on how to address these risks**<sup>xvii</sup> through PSHE education.
- **Key principles of prevention education (Produced by the PSHE Association on behalf of CEOP)**<sup>xviii</sup>

- 
- <sup>i</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/child-sexual-exploitation-prevention-and-intervention>
- <sup>ii</sup> <https://youthendowmentfund.org.uk/toolkit/dating-and-relationship-violence-prevention/>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.natsal.ac.uk/natsal-survey/natsal-3>
- <sup>iv</sup> A systematic literature review of school-based RSE by Goldfarb and Lieberman (2021) found strong evidence that it can reduce sexual violence and domestic violence.
- <sup>v</sup> [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/595828/170301\\_Policy\\_state\\_ment\\_PSHEv2](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/595828/170301_Policy_state_ment_PSHEv2)
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://20248256.fs1.hubspotusercontent-na1.net/hubfs/20248256/2016%20-%20August%20%20YouGov%20survey.pdf>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofsted-culture-change-needed-to-tackle-normalised-sexual-harassment-in-schools-and-colleges>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/safe-classroom-and-effective-teaching-interactive-posters>
- <sup>ix</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/mentoring>
- <sup>x</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-5/handling-complex-issues-safely-classroom>
- <sup>xi</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/training-and-events?tab=0>
- <sup>xii</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-4/assessment>
- <sup>xiii</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/resource/gathering-pupil-views-lesson-plan>
- <sup>xiv</sup> <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/>
- <sup>xv</sup> <https://www.csacentre.org.uk/documents/safety-planning-in-education/>
- <sup>xvi</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/guidance/ks1-5/addressing-misogyny-toxic-masculinity-and-social-media-influence-in-pshe-education>
- <sup>xvii</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/resource/addressing-pornography-pshe-guidance>
- <sup>xviii</sup> <https://pshe-association.org.uk/evidence-and-research-key-principles-of-effective-prevention-education>

The PSHE Association is the national body for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education – the school curriculum subject that supports pupils to be healthy, safe and prepared for modern life. PSHE education incorporates Health education, Relationships Education/RSE and economic wellbeing and careers.

A charity and membership organisation, the Association works to improve PSHE education standards by supporting a national community of teachers and schools with resources, training and advice.

**Find out more and become a member at [www.pshe-association.org.uk](http://www.pshe-association.org.uk)**