# The Curriculum for Wales – Relationships and Sexuality Education Code

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**Audience**

Under the Act, this guidance is statutory for the following:

- the head teacher of a maintained school or a maintained nursery school
- the governing body of a maintained school or a maintained nursery school
- a provider of funded non-maintained nursery education
- the teacher in charge of a pupil referral unit
- the management committee for a pupil referral unit
- a person who provides teaching and learning for a child, otherwise than at a maintained school, maintained nursery school or pupil referral unit (EOTAS)
- a local authority in Wales.

**Further information**

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Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.This document is also available in Welsh.

# Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Code

This Code contains mandatory requirements, the legal basis for which is set out in the [legislation summary](#) of this Curriculum for Wales framework guidance. It sets out the themes and matters that must be encompassed in RSE. A curriculum and teaching and learning must encompass the mandatory element of RSE outlined within the following RSE Code.

**Designing your curriculum**

This mandatory RSE Code supports schools to design their RSE. The content is set within the context of broad and interlinked learning strands, namely:

- relationships and identity
- sexual health and well-being
- empowerment, safety and respect.

These strands allow practitioners to design and develop a curriculum tailored to their learners, making connections and developing authentic contexts for learning across the curriculum.

The Welsh Government committed to covering the following themes in RSE: relationships; rights and equity; sex, gender and sexuality; bodies and body image; sexual health and well-being; and violence, safety and support. To assist schools and settings in their planning of RSE, these themes are interwoven into the learning strands.

Across the learning strands, curriculum content in RSE must be inclusive and reflect diversity. It must include learning that develops learners' awareness and understanding of different identities, views and values and a diversity of relationships, gender and sexuality, including LGBTQ+ lives.

Learning about rights and equity runs through all the strands, as well as embedding learning and experience through a rights-based approach to the learning.

**Content appropriate to learner development**

The Act requires that the RSE schools provide must be developmentally appropriate for learners. This means schools and settings must take account of a range of factors including the learner's age; knowledge and maturity; any additional learning needs and anticipating their physiological and emotional development. RSE must be developmentally appropriate for each learner, meaning that learners' needs of similar ages may differ.

The phases have been designed to give practitioners an understanding of what is likely to be developmentally appropriate. For example, in phase 1 and 2, learners will be taught about the principles of general consent as pre-requisites for learning about sexual consent at the developmentally appropriate time in phase 3. In practice, this means learners in phases one and two developing an awareness of asking for permission to share materials, for example toys; or learning about respecting personal boundaries.

The phases are designed to help schools and settings make judgements about whether learning is developmentally appropriate for specific learners. The ages set out below indicate broadly when practitioners should start to consider whether learning in a phase is developmentally appropriate for their learners. This may mean some learners will be ready for specific learning before the broad indications given in the Code, but likewise it may mean that some learners need opportunity for further development before they engage with specific learning.  Introduction to a phase may be gradual: with some learning in that phase being developmentally appropriate for learners sooner than other learning. As outlined above, these decisions must be based on a range of factors.

The tables attached to each strand of learning below are in three broad developmental phases. As they are set out, they represent the building blocks of progression in RSE. As learners progress, they will be building upon previous learning from either phase one; or phases one and two, consolidating and strengthening the same dispositions, knowledge and skills and applying them in new, relevant contexts. This is very different to simply acquiring learning about topics in isolation and then moving on to other content.

The learning for RSE refers to both what is taught expressly and what is embedded throughout the curriculum and in the school environment through the whole school approach.

# Relationships and identity

This strand focuses on:

- the range of relationships that human beings have throughout their lives
- how identity can be shaped by our relationships and sexuality
- the importance of human rights in securing healthy, safe and fulfilling relationships in an inclusive society.

Learners need to develop the understanding and behaviours that will support them to develop and maintain healthy, safe and fulfilling relationships throughout their lives. Learners need to be supported to recognise and value different types of relationships, including families and friendships, as well as the diversity within different types of relationships, including LGBTQ+ diversity, and that these can change over time. Developing empathy, compassion and communication skills are critical to learners' relationships now and the relationships they will form in the future. This will also support respect, understanding and equitable treatment for others, whatever their sex, gender, sexuality, faith or belief.

Learners also need to develop both their sense of self and their sense of everyone being unique. Over time, learners can explore how relationships, sex, gender, romantic and sexual attraction and personal experiences may shape and inform a person's identity and individuality. This supports learners to understand how identity, relationships and sexuality are informed by biology, technology and social, cultural and religious norms and that these may change over time. By engaging with these aspects, learners can recognise both positive and harmful behaviours and norms and have the confidence to speak up for themselves and to speak out and advocate for the rights and respect of others.

This strand also recognises how rights can support and underpin equitable, respectful relationships, as well as a fair and inclusive society.

| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 |
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| Practitioners should consider learners' developmental appropriateness for learning in each phase: | | |
| From age 3 | From age 7 | From age 11 |
| The learning supports: | | |
| Ability to act with kindness, empathy and compassion in interactions with others immediate to them including family, friendship and peer relationships. | Ability to form and maintain relationships which are equitable, respectful and kind with a range of others. | Understanding the positive and negative characteristics and healthy or unhealthy aspects of a range of relationships including family, friendship, romantic and sexual. Ability to develop and understand the importance of equity, mutual respect, |

| | | and affection in relationships with others. |
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| An awareness of how to communicate wants and needs in relationships, and begin to respect those of others.<br><br>Awareness of how needs relate to rights. | How understanding and use of effective communication, decision-making, managing conflict and refusal skills are part of ensuring your own and others rights and part of friendships and relationships. | Understanding and use of effective communication, decision making, managing and resolving conflict, and refusal skills in a range of different contexts and types of relationships, offline and online, including intimate relationships.<br><br>Understanding how to speak out about harmful behaviours directed at them or others. |
| Awareness of the diversity of families and relationships, including friendship and peer relationships, and why these are important. | Recognition of the characteristics of different families, friendship and peer relationships and the diversity of these.<br><br>Understanding positive behaviours in relationships and what can happen when relationships breakdown.<br><br>An awareness of how families, relationships and parenting are shaped by social and cultural norms and laws that have changed over time. | Understanding how the diversity of relationships including marriage, and all types of civil partnership, has changed over time, and how relationships are positively and negatively impacted by social and cultural norms and laws in different ways around the world. |
| Developing a sense of themselves, in the context of families, friends and communities.<br><br>Recognising how people value different things and have different families, friends and communities. | Recognising how people's relationships with others shape who they are and their happiness.<br><br>An awareness of how identity can be expressed in different ways. | Understanding how rights need to be balanced in a diverse society; the characteristics, benefits and challenges of living in a diverse society; and how and why attitudes have changed and are changing including towards gender and sexuality diversity. |

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| Experiencing inclusive behaviours, language and role modelling that show respect for others, whatever their gender.<br><br>Recognising learners' rights to be treated fairly, kindly and with respect. | Valuing and recognising the contributions of everyone; and the importance of sex and gender equality.<br><br>Recognise and know how to safely respond to and challenge gender and sexual stereotypes and unfair behaviour.<br><br>An awareness of how positive and negative social and cultural norms regarding sex, gender and sexuality influence relationships and behaviours | An ability to advocate for and advance the rights of all and understand and respect all people in relation to sex, gender and sexuality.<br><br>Understanding how the law and human rights secure freedoms around sex, gender and sexuality and how these can differ in other countries and over time.<br><br>Ability to critically explore and understand how a range of social, cultural and religious norms and influences about relationships, sex, gender and sexuality can shape perceptions and our well-being and can be both positive and harmful. |

# Sexual health and well-being

This strand focuses on:

- learning about how living things grow, reproduce and have a life cycle
- developing an understanding of the human body, including people's feelings about their bodies and how these can be represented
- the health issues related to relationships and sexuality
- an understanding of how sexuality and sexual health affects our well-being.

In early development, learners need to experience contexts for understanding the importance of maintaining personal health and well-being, including hygiene, and how this impacts on themselves and others. This progresses to applying broad principles of health and hygiene within sexual health.

As learners develop, teaching and learning needs to include focus on exploring how physical changes have an impact on well-being and relationships ensuring the representation of LGBTQ+ experiences and lives. Learning also focuses on menstrual well-being and conditions which can affect the reproductive system; as well as developing understanding of the possible outcomes of the decisions made relating to sexual health and relationships. All of this learning will focus on recognising the diversity of human body types, how perception and understanding of the human body is shaped by society, the law, science and technology and the impact of this on well-being.

| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Practitioners should consider learners' developmental appropriateness for learning in each phase: | | |
| From age 3 | From age 7 | From age 11 |
| The learning supports: | | |
| The use of accurate terminology for all body parts.<br><br>An awareness of the human life cycle and that reproduction is a part of life. | Knowledge and understanding of how reproductive organs develop in a human body. This includes understanding fertility and the processes of reproduction, including what supports menstrual health and well-being.<br><br>Recognising the process of pregnancy and birth. | Understanding how fertility, sexual function and menstrual health and well-being can change across the life course and how to find information and support when needed.<br><br>The knowledge and understanding of how hormones continue to affect emotional and physical health throughout adulthood. |

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| | | Understanding how contraception can assist with reproductive choices, including awareness of abortion. |
| Awareness of how human bodies change as they grow. | The knowledge and understanding of how people experience significant physical, emotional, social and cognitive changes during puberty. | Understanding of good sexual and reproductive health, including the range of risks and outcomes from sexual experiences and the knowledge needed to support informed decisions about sexual activity and about reproductive choices. |
| An awareness of the importance of personal self-care and hygiene. | The knowledge and skills needed to manage personal self-care and hygiene, including the importance of menstrual well-being. | The knowledge and understanding of the causes, symptoms and impact of conditions connected to sexual and reproductive health and to fertility, including sexually transmitted infections, HIV and reproductive cancers.<br><br>Understanding and skills needed to minimise risks and seek help. |
| A recognition that everyone's body is unique and special to them. | An awareness that there are many different sources of information offline and online that help us learn about our bodies and affect how we feel about our body and other people's bodies. | Critically engaging with positive and negative representations of a diversity of bodies, including through various forms of media and understanding that these can be unrealistic and harmful. |

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| Awareness of the different feelings one can have, recognising other people's feelings and how these may differ to your own. | Awareness of how people can feel attracted to others as they mature and how this can lead to emotional and physical responses. | Understanding how all are entitled to safe and pleasurable relationships and recognising the role consensual sexual activity plays within healthy relationships.<br><br>Understanding the legal age of consent. |
| Recognising trusted adults who can help them and whom they can talk to and ask questions of, especially when they feel unhappy or unsafe. | Be able to identify trustworthy sources of information and able to raise issues and questions with trusted adults. | Recognise and be able to use a range of support services to access information and support around relationships, health and well-being and safety. |

# Empowerment, safety and respect

This strand focuses on:

- learners' rights to safety and protection and freedom from harm and discrimination
- how and where to seek information, help and support
- how to support and advocate for the rights, fair treatment and respect of all.

This strand builds on the positive behaviours and skills of healthy relationships. It reinforces the requirement to support learners to develop empathy, kindness and compassion towards each other and empowering them with the confidence to draw upon available support if they are concerned about their own safety or that of others.

Learners should be supported to understand change and conflict and recognise the impact of these on relationships, and where appropriate seek help and support.

They should be supported to understand that exercising their right to be free from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse and neglect is enabled by trusted adults who can support their safety. This includes through a number of legal protections that exist for all. Criminal law makes such behaviours unlawful and there are criminal sanctions for those found guilty of committing such offences.

Learners need to develop an understanding of the social, emotional, physical and legal nature and impact of harmful behaviours, including all bullying, and LGBTQ+ based bullying, sexual violence and gender-based violence in a range of contexts, including online.

| Phase 1 | Phase 2 | Phase 3 |
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| Practitioners should consider learners' developmental appropriateness for learning in each phase: | | |
| **From age 3** | **From age 7** | **From age 11** |
| **The learning supports:** | | |
| Recognising harmful behaviour including behaviours which are discriminatory and the right to be free from discrimination.<br><br>Ability to interact with others in a way that is fair. | Understanding of the importance of fair treatment for all and of respect in all interpersonal interactions offline and online.<br><br>Recognising the value of non-discriminatory behaviours and when and how to take safe action to respond to and challenge discriminatory behaviours. | Understanding the importance of inclusivity, including for LGBTQ+ people, non-discrimination and the value of diversity in our interpersonal behaviours and relationships.<br><br>Developing a sense of individual and social responsibility to others, including consideration of how we respond to behaviours that are |

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| | | discriminatory, disrespectful and harmful, offline and online. |
| Recognising the right to be free from harmful, abusive and bullying behaviour.<br><br>An awareness of how to recognise positive and harmful behaviours, including bullying.<br><br>Ability to share with a trusted adult when faced with harmful behaviours. | Understanding of the right for everyone to be free from harm or abuse.<br><br>An awareness of different kinds of harmful or abusive behaviour including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse and neglect, including peer on peer harassment and bullying and the role technology can play.<br><br>How to seek support for oneself, and offer support to others.<br><br>How to be a good friend and advocate for others. | Recognising harmful, abusive or coercive behaviour in personal relationships including control, violence and sexual violence and how to respond and seek help for self and others. This includes all forms of violence based on sex, gender and sexuality. |
| *(Phases 1 and 2 include pre-requisite knowledge and skills for understanding the learning on consent at phase 3)*<br><br>Beginning to recognise that other people have thoughts, feelings and opinions that are different.<br><br>An awareness of the need to seek agreement in order to share, for example toys.<br><br>An awareness of everyone's right to privacy, personal boundaries and which parts of the body are private.<br><br>Ability to communicate if someone is touching them | Understanding of the right to bodily privacy, personal boundaries including online.<br><br>Understanding how behaviours may be perceived by others offline and online.<br><br>Recognising which steps to take to keep safe from harm both in offline and online friendships.<br><br>Understanding the social and emotional norms and pressures that lead to non-consensual behaviours, friendships and relationships, for example, gender norms. | Understanding of the importance of consent for safe and healthy relationships and in particular sexual relationships.<br><br>Understanding of how consent can be communicated in different social contexts and relationships, including online.<br><br>A critical understanding of how consent is impacted by perception and social context and the factors that influence and impair people's ability to engage in consensual behaviour, for example, substances, violence, |

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| in a way that makes them feel uncomfortable. | Developing the skills to build consensual behaviours and relationships and know how to safely respond, challenge and report non-consensual behaviours and relationships offline and online. | coercion and relationship norms. |
| Awareness of how to keep safe when using digital media, including sharing with a trusted adult when they feel uncomfortable or scared. | Know how and when digital media can be shared safely, with permission and when it can be a source of harm.<br><br>Awareness of the benefits and dangers of the internet and social media in forming friendships online.<br><br>Exploring the motives behind fabricated and digitally-altered media.<br><br>An understanding of the need to keep safe online, an ability to take steps to protect themselves and an ability to share with trusted adults where something is seen that shouldn't have been, or is upsetting or uncomfortable. | Understand the ethical and legal issues relating to the consensual and non-consensual sharing of self-generated imagery, and rights to safety, support well-being and protection.<br><br>Understanding the impacts associated with sexual material and intimacy online, including the ethical and legal implications.<br><br>An awareness of how sexual material and media often represents gender, sexual activity, bodily appearance and relationships in unrealistic and harmful ways. |
| An awareness that everyone has the right to be safe and no one is allowed to harm anyone else.<br><br>Ability to speak up for each other. | Awareness of laws in place to protect from different forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect and harassment. | An understanding of laws around RSE issues that are in place to protect us from all forms of discrimination, violence, abuse, neglect and harassment, and that laws are intended to protect not criminalise young people.<br><br>An understanding of how to advocate for safe |

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| | 14 | environments and the rights and understanding of everyone on a range of RSE issues.<br><br>Appreciate the importance of safely speaking out against sex and gender based and sexual violence. |