

CONVERSATIONS WITH YOUR CHILD ABOUT THEIR BODIES, KEEPING SAFE, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX

Carol Battram, Primary Assistant Principal Learning and Welfare

Parents respond in many different ways when I send out invitations to attend an RSE presentation. RSE stands for Relationship and Sex Education, but it's often the second half of that equation that gets all the attention.

Talking with your child about relationships, their body, and how to keep themselves safe and healthy, works best as an ongoing conversation. We teach RSE units towards the end of the school year, but your child may have questions at any time, so please – don't wait for us!



Most children are curious about Relationships and Sex. It's interesting stuff. They therefore need accurate information about how bodies change and how humans reproduce. Answers can be kept simple but must be truthful. If you don't know the answer, be honest about that as well.

You may already have read this recent article in the Guardian which is very timely - [How to teach young people about sex and relationships](#).

As they get older, children need to learn not only about the changes that come with puberty, but also how to manage their feeling and navigate their relationships. These conversations need to introduce the concept of consent and personal responsibility at an age-appropriate level.

An on-going conversation will help your child prepare for young adulthood and it's worth thinking ahead about what you want to share, as well as how you might answer

their questions. Most of us have some idea of the values we hold dear, even if we have never clearly articulated them. What's important to your family, your culture, your beliefs?

WHAT VALUES DO YOU WISH TO SHARE WITH YOUR CHILD?

If you aren't sure how much they know, ask them some questions back. If your child asks a question in the wrong place, it's fine to delay answering but agree that you'll talk about it at home. If you avoid answering questions, your child will learn that some issues are not discussed at home and look elsewhere for answers. Be realistic about the possibility that your child will view online content not designed for children. There's a huge naïveté gap between parents, who may remain oblivious, and the high number of children accessing pornography or other graphic content online, even if it is just being shown a quick clip on a friend's phone.

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

Behaviours change as children get older and you may recognise some of these behaviours.

- Your child is now embarrassed about being seen naked in front of you.
- They only want to play with friends of the same gender.
- Games include relationship role-play.
- They are curious about body changes, sex and the arrival of babies.

Below is a very rough guide to the ages at which children show interest in their body, their sense of privacy, and changing relationships as they move through Primary. If this doesn't line up with your own experience, don't worry as there is a lot of variance.

Infancy: Up to two years

Toddlers learn names for all parts of the body including genitalia.

They may start to identify the more obvious differences between genders.

Two to five years old

Children can understand that a man and a woman can make a baby together, and that the baby grows inside the woman.

They learn that their body belongs to them and that private parts are private.

They should be taught about different types of touching; some touches are safe and comforting, some are not safe and not welcome.

They need to know what to do and who to tell if they feel unsafe or unsure.

Five to eight years old

Children understand social conventions around privacy, nudity and respect for others.

They understand that we all change and grow in different ways.

They are interested to learn more about how babies are made, and the different ways in which babies are born.

A number of children will experience puberty changes before age 10.

Nine to 12 years old

All children should know about the likely changes at puberty.

They are developing an understanding of what makes a relationship healthy and positive, including consent, safety and respect.

They should be taught how to judge whether depictions of sex and sexuality from various sources are true or false, realistic or not, positive or negative.

NAMING BODY PARTS

It helps to have the right words for all parts of the body, including male and female genitalia, and we teach these words as part of our PSHE and RSE curriculum. As a family, you may have other names for these body parts. By naming all visible body parts, including vulva, testicles, nipples and penis, children develop the sense of ownership that comes with knowledge.

If parts of the body are left unnamed, it is hard for the child to talk about their body, to ask clear questions or to

ask for help. It's hard to feel in control of a 'down there'.

CHANGES AT PUBERTY

- A child who knows what to expect is less likely to become anxious.
- Some start puberty as young as eight years old although this is unusual.
- Everyone experiences change during puberty and it should not be a mystery.
- Don't shroud things in mystery. Inform girls about boys' changes, and boys about girls' changes.
- Boys need to know about involuntary erections and wet dreams, so that they know what to expect. Girls need to know about periods and to have access to a range of sanitary products.
- They may start to challenge the status quo in their relationships with adults.
- They might experience significant and complex upsets within their friendship group.

UNWILLING TO TALK?

Not every child, or indeed parent, wants to talk about puberty, sex and relationships.

There are many other information resources both [online](#) and in our libraries.

TEACHING CHILDREN TO KEEP THEMSELVES SAFE.

We teach our students to keep themselves safe and regularly revisit our Student Safeguarding Code of Conduct. It helps when children hear similar messages both from home and from school.

Many of our students will be familiar with Pantasaurus, but this is a message worth repeating, even if the song drives you to the brink.

If you start talking with them now, they will learn that you are their Number One Trusted Adult when they need support and truthful information. If you've never talked Pants before, you may find these clips useful viewing:

[Pantasaurus song \(What's in your PANTS\)](#)

[Parents talking about PANTS](#)

[How to talk with your child about keeping themselves safe](#)