

# Relationships & Sex

## Relationships and sex education at home and at school

All boys at the College have a weekly Wellbeing lesson and many of these lessons focus on Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Boys are encouraged to think about how to form healthy relationships, about why people have sex and how to ensure it is safe and enjoyable when they decide the time is right. They learn about the law, discuss sexually transmitted infections and contraception, different sexualities and genders, consent, pornography and sexting amongst other topics. Topics are always covered in an age-appropriate way and boys are given the chance to ask any questions they have.

Many parents say that their children come home and talk enthusiastically about these lessons. Others only find out about them from a comment in their end of year reports and most realise it can be challenging to talk to teenagers about sex, especially if it's not something we are really comfortable talking about ourselves. It is a very personal subject, about emotions and values as much as the biological and practical aspects, and our own views are often clouded by the things we were told as children and which may or may not be helpful. Whilst it might be tempting to 'leave it to the experts' then, good RSE is a partnership

between home and school and so we've put together a few tips on how to start the conversation:

**1. Listen.** Children do want advice from their parents, and most parents want to help. But parents' anxieties about keeping their children safe can often lead to lecturing and get in the way of a useful conversation. If you don't know where to start, try asking them an open question like 'how are your friendships going at the moment?' and repeating back to them some of what they have said. You don't have to have a single big chat where you cover everything - start early and have lots of small conversations at different times as they grow up.

**2. Do your research.** We wouldn't teach an RSE course without putting a lot of thought into the content and resources, and if you want to be useful to your teenager you may have to take some of your advice to them and commit to some hard work and studying! There are lots of great resources available for parents and teenagers, a few of which are listed at the bottom of this page. The more informed you are, and the more you have thought through different arguments and perspectives, the easier it will be to talk to your children.

**3. Talk about more than just sex.** Practical, non-judgmental and honest advice about sex is

an important part of RSE, but there are lots of other things that are just as important to talk about too. Teaching younger children about consent is about touching, borrowing and respecting personal space for example, and talking about same sex relationships and families doesn't necessarily have to involve a detailed discussion of sexual acts. You could try starting conversations about issues in the news. Why do some people object to abortion? How old should you need to be to get married? Why are men increasingly worried about their bodies? Should the internet be censored?

**4. It doesn't need to be personal.** Some teenagers are happy talking about themselves, but most have anxieties and insecurities and may be uncomfortable answering personal questions. You don't need to talk about yourself or your own experiences to have a useful conversation either. Buying them a book that talks about the issues (one suggestion is at the end of this document) or watching a television program with them and discussing it can be as helpful as trying to explain everything yourself.

**5. Keep an open mind.** A group of teenagers of the same age will generally be at very different stages of development, both physically and emotionally. Boys may be straight, gay, bisexual or unsure or not want to pin themselves down to a label. They may be in a relationship and considering having sex or they may just want to spend a few more years playing computer games with their friends first. Our own views and upbringings inevitably frame our views to some extent, but always try to keep an open mind. Challenge any assumptions you have about what your children will be or do in the future and help them come to their own informed conclusions about who they want to be.

**6. Ask for help if you need it.** Talking to our children about sex can be challenging. We might realise they are growing up faster than we expected, or find we disagree with their perspectives. It might remind us of issues we faced as teenagers or bring up uncomfortable memories or experiences from our own relationships. Parents need support too, and there are many professionals and organisations who can help, some of which are listed below.

### Websites

<http://www.fpa.org.uk/resources/leaflet-and-booklet-downloads> - a wide range of leaflets about RSE aimed at various age groups, as well as information about contraception and STIs.

[www.bishuk.com](http://www.bishuk.com) – a website created by an experienced sex educator with lots of articles and advice suitable for teens over 14 as well as information aimed at parents and educators. A good starting point for parents is <http://www.bishuk.com/parents/talking-about-sex-with-teens/>

### Books

Being a Boy – James Dawson, Red Lemon Press, 2013 – an informal book for teenagers about growing up, sex, relationships, body image and masculinity – the perfect birthday present!

Horny and Hormonal – Young People, Sex and the Anxieties of Sexuality, Nick Luxmoore, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2016 – A much more challenging book for adults and educators who want to explore the issues more deeply, written by an experienced counsellor who has worked extensively with teenagers.

### Listening services and helplines:

[www.samaritans.org/](http://www.samaritans.org/) The Samaritans offer a free confidential listening service 24 hours a day, 7 days a week (call 116 123 from the UK).

[www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk) Anyone up to age 19 can call Childline at any time for confidential support (0800 1111)

[www.switchboard.lgbt](http://www.switchboard.lgbt) Switchboard LGBT+ (Lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender) Helpline – or information and support about LGBT issues.

