

SEND

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
all different – all together



TEACHING RSHE AND PUPILS WITH SEND



St. Helens Council

Guidance for Teaching RSHE to Pupils with SEND

Presentation Aims:

- To support schools in understanding their duties regarding SEND and relationships, sex and health education
- To support schools in recognising some of the challenges pupils with SEND may face in these subjects
- To provide some of the approaches you might take to mitigate these challenges

References/Further Reading:
<https://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/sites/default/files/field/attachment/RSE%20for%20disabled%20pupils%20and%20pupils%20with%20SEN%20-%20SEF.pdf>

Specific Duties Regarding Pupils

with SEND

- High quality Relationships & Sex Education (RSE) is every child's their level of need or ability. Both mainstream and special schools Government guidance on the subject, and new legislation mand applies to every type of school in England.
- The Equalities Act provides the guiding principle that disabled pupils participate in the curriculum, so RSE must be accessible. The guidance the need for flexibility, to tailor content and teaching to meet the children at different developmental stages, and also advises that some pupils are more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and the nature of their SEND. Schools are reminded that the Equalities positive action where pupils with SEND may experience disadvantage 'protected characteristic'.
- It is important to emphasise that the teacher is responsible for meeting these needs and that support staff work under their guidance.

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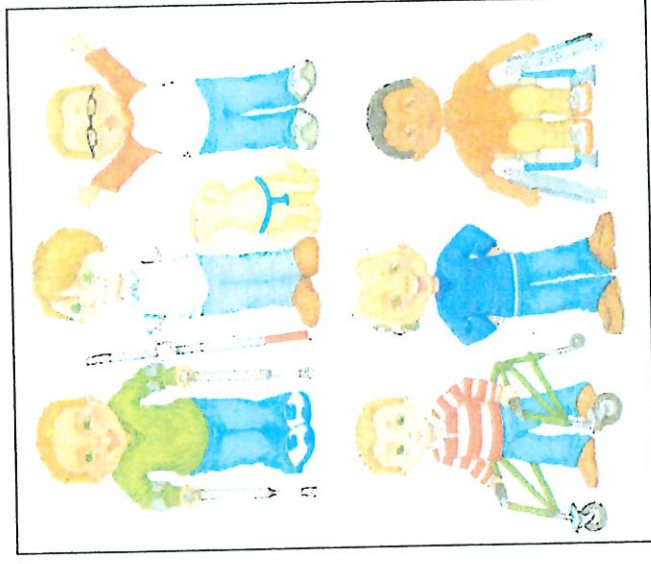
Recognising Challenges

Points to Consider on the Importance of RSHE to Pupils with SEND

- Historically, some pupils with SEND have felt excluded from relationships, sex and health education. For each lesson, consider whether pupils will feel excluded, and make sure you address their needs.
- Pupils with SEND are generally more vulnerable to abuse, bullying and other issues because of their SEND:
- In 2019, 37% of pupils with SEND reported being bullied based on other pupils' attitudes or assumptions towards their SEND at least once in the past year (source: [DfE report](#)).
- In 2012, Jones et al concluded that children and young people who have disabilities are at an increased risk of being abused compared with their non-disabled peers (source: [NSPCC](#)). For more on preventing abuse, see the **Being Safe** module.

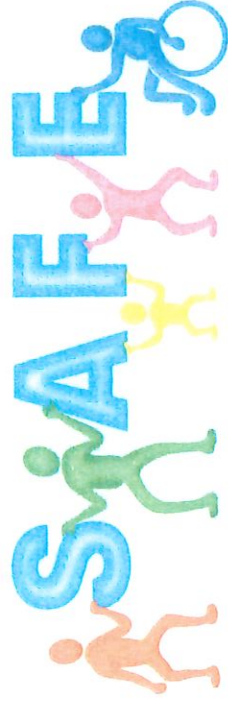


- Pupils with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs or learning disabilities can especially benefit from relationships, sex and health education. In particular, a focus on friendships and healthy relationships and how this can impact on emotional wellbeing.
- In addition, this focus on healthy relationships must be taught explicitly and referred to at appropriate points throughout as pupils with SEND can be vulnerable to abusive relationships (including 'mate crime' where people with SEND are targeted and befriended for financial abuse).
- Pupils with SEND may not have the skills required to identify when a friendship or relationship is unhealthy. For example, they may not recognise coercive relationships. For more on coercion, see the **Respectful Relationships** module.



Before you start....

- **Safeguarding** is possibly the most pressing argument for teaching relationships, sex and health education to pupils with special educational needs and disability (SEND) — who are, generally, more vulnerable to abuse, bullying, exploitation and other issues because of their SEND.
- Pupils with SEND may need extra help to deal with peer pressure and coercion.
- Pupils may be affected by issues discussed in lessons.
- Let your designated safeguarding lead or deputy and any other relevant staff, such as pastoral leads, know what you are teaching. This will enable them to identify and speak to relevant pupils, especially those who they know may have been directly impacted by issues covered in the lessons and those with adverse childhood experiences.

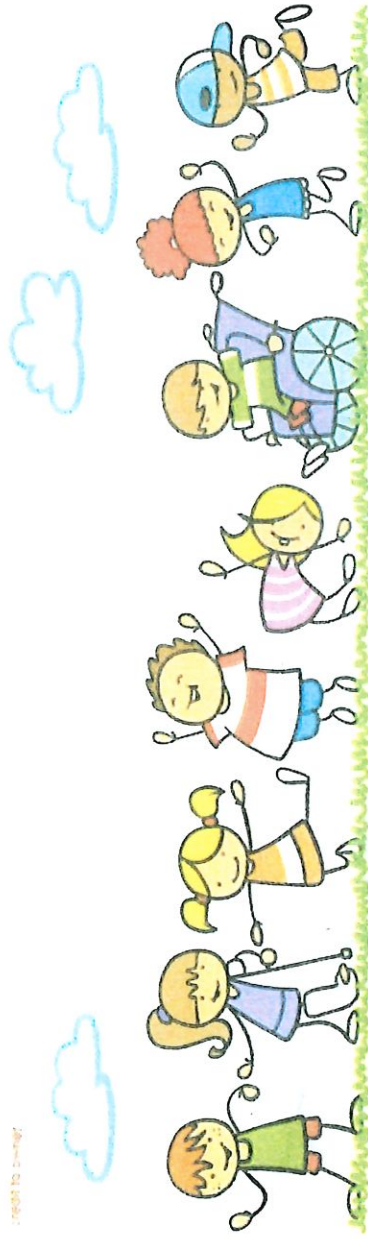




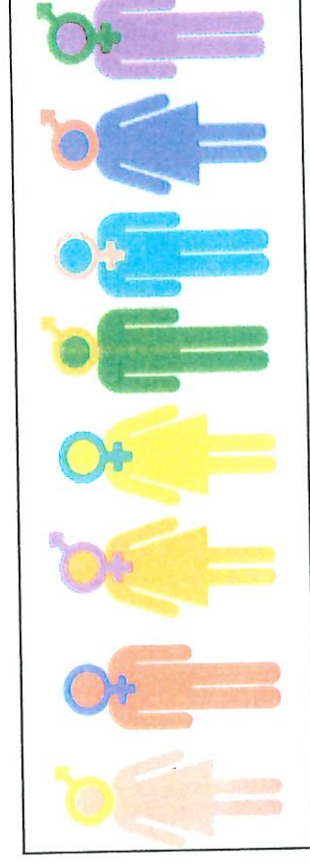
Be Mindful of

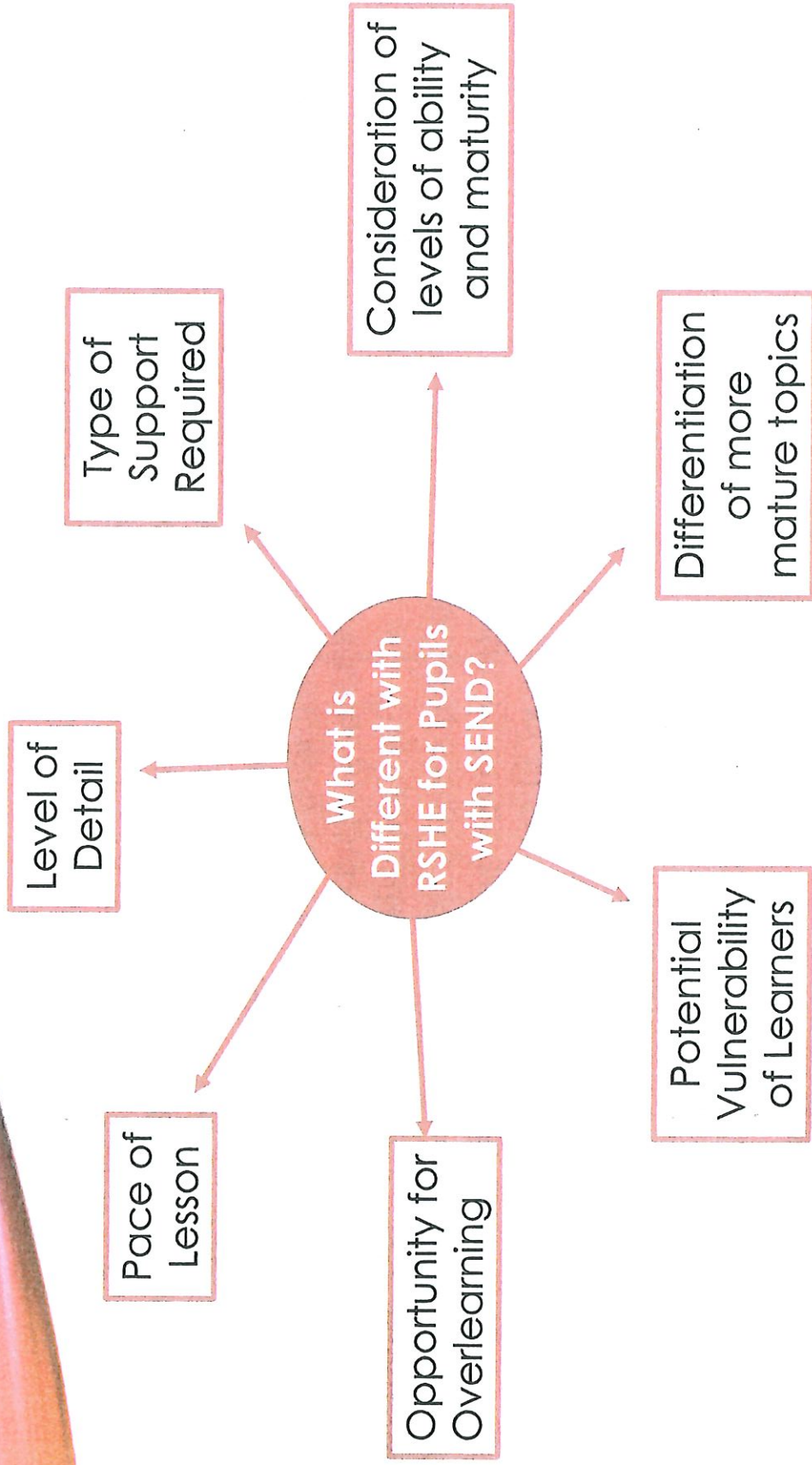
- **The diversity of pupils.** There should be no assumption even that pupils with a particular type of disability or need should be taught in the same way as each other. Teaching of any subject should be **tailored to remove barriers and meet the needs** of the individual pupils being taught; for disabled pupils and pupils with SEN, it is therefore all the more important that reasonable adjustments to teaching are informed by parents and pupils themselves.
- **Appropriateness of groupings within mainstream.** Pupils with SEND in mainstream schools may need additional support to make sense of RSE lessons, sometimes separate small group sessions or individual work can help, especially since aspects of their maturity may lag behind their peers. It may be appropriate to offer additional small group sessions for pupils with SEND which allow for questions and discussion that might be challenging or increase the risk of bullying in a usual class format.

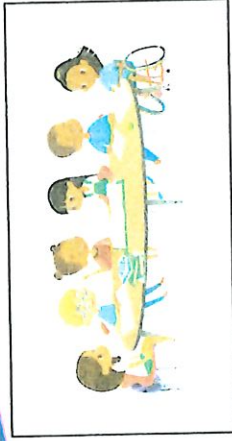
- **Requirements of pupils with more significant needs.** Their particular RSE needs may helpfully be assessed as part of an Education Health Care (EHC) needs assessment, with provision to meet those needs set out in their EHC plan. For pupils who already have an EHC plan, specific consideration of their RSE needs may helpfully be provided at annual review.



- **LGBTQ+ needs and inclusion.** Some SEND pupils will also be LGBTQ+ and some SEND pupils will have LGBTQ+ parents or carers, family and friends.
- Unfortunately, where RSE is taught to pupils with SEND the LGBTQ+ part of the curriculum (compulsory from 2020 in secondary schools) is often missed. However, young people with learning disabilities are more likely to express themselves authentically, become attracted to whoever they are attracted to, and not conform to the general cis-heteronormative bias of western society, and many other social norms (Abbott, 2015).
- The statutory guidelines (DfE, 2019) state that: "Schools are free to determine how they do this, and we expect all pupils to have been taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum."







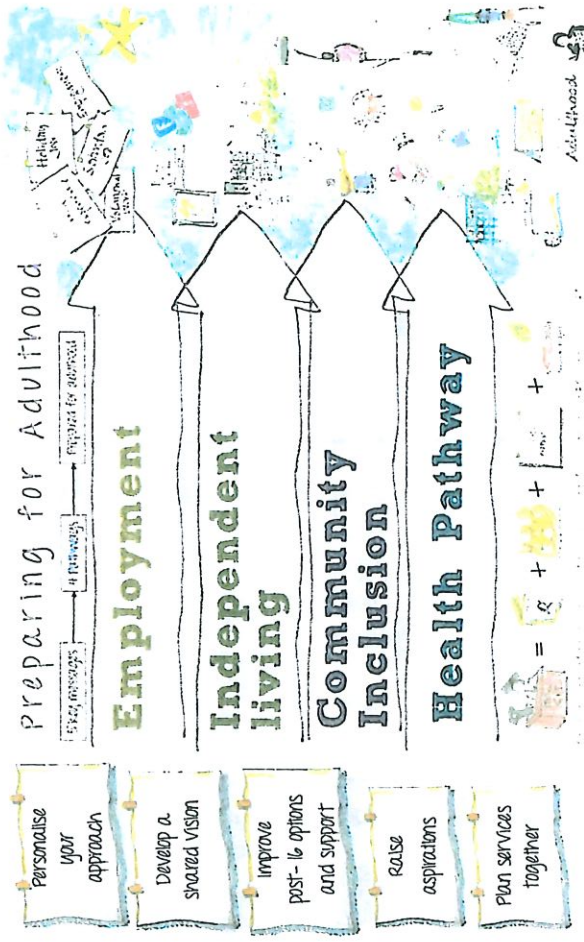
- In essence the curriculum and topics covered are similar to RSHE with mainstream pupils however, the **pace** and **detail** of topics may be different and pupils may need lots of **support** to generalise their learning outside of RSHE lessons and support to personalise the learning to their own relationships, behaviours and maturation.
- It may be appropriate to revisit topics more frequently with pupils with SEND to support ‘**overlearning**’ (i.e. practising and embedding the new skills, so the learner retains the learning beyond the initial success and develops mastery).
- Government guidance acknowledges that there may be a need for schools to tailor content and teaching to meet the specific needs of pupils at **different developmental stages**. The guidance also acknowledges the greater **vulnerability** to bullying, exploitation and other issues for pupils with SEND. For example, older pupils at an earlier level of development are more vulnerable and therefore have greater need to be informed and supported in RSHE. We recommend caution in omitting content, encouraging teachers of learners with SEND to **differentiate** teaching to developmental ability wherever possible, rather than limit the topics covered.

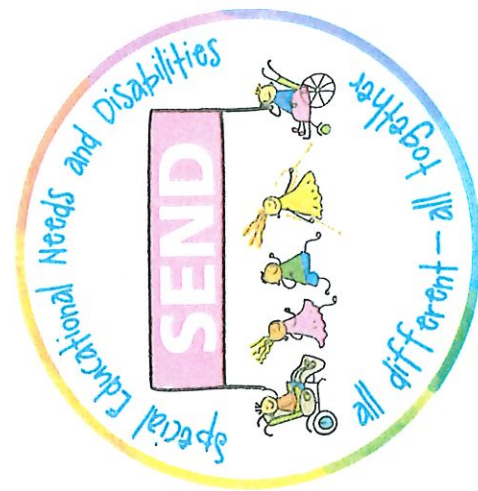
'Preparing for Adulthood' Outcomes

You might want to link lesson outcomes with statutory 'preparing for adulthood' outcomes for those with an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. (See SEND Code of Practice, section 8.)

In particular you may want to consider outcomes such as:

- **Community Inclusion** - including having friends and supportive relationships, and participating in, and contributing to, the local community
- **Health** - being as healthy as possible in adult life

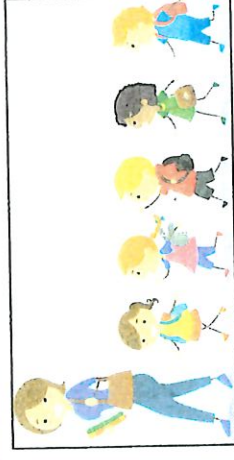




Advice on Teaching Approaches

General Advice for Delivering RSHE to Children with SEND:

- Ensure that teachers and teaching assistants assigned to deliver RSHE to pupils with SEND are **confident** and **comfortable** with the content, and with teaching this material to pupils with SEND.
- Set the tone and establish ground rules to **build a safe environment** which encourages pupils to ask questions and express their thoughts. This is particularly important for those pupils with SEND who may lack maturity and need to be given the tools to be able to take part in these lessons appropriately.
- As previously mentioned, pupils with SEND are **generally more vulnerable** to abuse, bullying and other issues. They will need to feel that the classroom is a **safe space** where they are able to explore the topic without fear of ridicule or judgement from their peers.
- When the needs of pupils in the classroom suggest it, consider supplementing the approach with **alternatives to classroom teaching**, such as digital approaches, one-to-one discussions, small-group sessions, or targeted sessions for some pupils. This can help to teach key vocabulary or concepts that pupils may not understand, consolidate learning, and ensure content has been understood. It also gives an opportunity for **personalised teaching to meet specific needs**.



- Set **ground rules** at the beginning of every lesson, make it clear that some pupils may find the content challenging and suggest **trusted adults** they could approach after the lesson to talk more about the content.
- At the start of each lesson, remind pupils of the need to **respect privacy**. Pupils with SEND may need to be explicitly taught what is meant by privacy, giving examples that may not necessarily relate to relationships, sex and health education. Pupils can discuss examples but must not use names or descriptions that identify anyone, including themselves.
- Consider pupils who struggle with their emotional regulation. Alongside revisiting ground rules, start each lesson with a **check-in on feelings**. Offer mini breaks or other strategies during the session for those who need them.
- For some pupils with SEND, it may be necessary to repeat lessons in order to **consolidate understanding**.
- If possible, consider using learning support assistants to provide support and facilitate pupils' **emotional regulation** (for example, by taking short breaks away from the classroom).

Inclusive Language

Use **medically/scientifically correct language** to accurately describe human anatomy and the processes of the body.

Consider providing a **glossary** that explains the terms used (including pictures) and lists alternative language such as slang.

Reinforce explanations **visually** wherever possible. Role play, discussions using sentence starters and scripts, using actual examples in films or working with visiting actors can help the topic become accessible. This should be **revisited** often to ensure deep learning.

Use **straightforward, explicit explanations** and language. Avoid euphemisms – some pupils with SEND may not understand them.

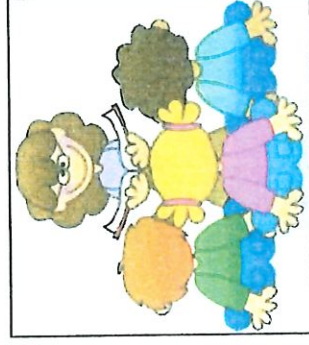
Use **inclusive language**. Convey to pupils with SEND the message that their needs are important and they deserve to learn this material.

Provide pupils with **resources** that are representative of a variety of SEND (and feature different ethnicities, sexes, and sexualities).



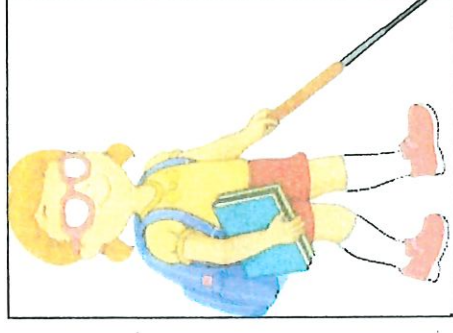
Language and Vocabulary

- Some of the vocabulary in the materials is difficult. Use **simple, clear, unambiguous language** alongside key technical vocabulary.
- **Pre- and post-teach key vocabulary** explicitly using visuals, concrete objects, word mats, and role play.
- Some concepts may need to be **explicitly taught**. For example concepts such as 'friend' and the concepts of public and private (which need to be explicitly revisited when ground rules are presented at the beginning of each lesson).
- **Visually reinforce all key messages** wherever possible, and use visual prompts where appropriate.
- **Consider specialist resources** such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) support tools.

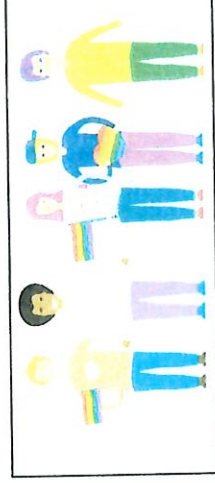


Ensuring Inclusivity:

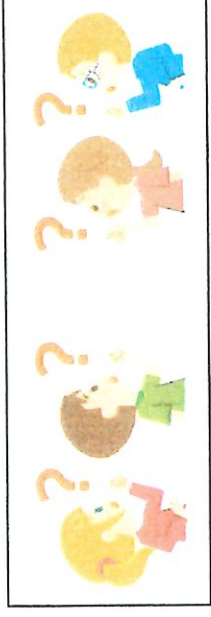
- Ensure all **resources and images used are inclusive of all pupils** e.g. including those in wheelchairs, or wearing hearing aids – as a general rule in both mainstream and SEND provision, not just when a pupil in a wheelchair is in the RSE class.
- This should be part of your **general inclusive approach** to RSE (and in other subjects and whole-school) and **images should represent SEND, LGBT+, a range of ethnicities, and all the protected characteristics**. Your choice of images and characterisation should reinforce the message that human sexuality is a positive thing and that **no-one is excluded** from that.
- Materials should be available in **appropriate learning media** including tactile diagrams and physical materials when required. **Be aware of language** used in RSE and ensure that it is inclusive, for example don't talk about 'jumping into bed' which may be a confusing use of language for pupils on the autism spectrum and may exclude people with mobility issues.



- Reflect on **inclusivity of language** across the protected characteristics not just in terms of SEN and disability, e.g. using the phrase **'most girls / boys' rather than 'all'** when describing puberty and body changes, to support LGBT+ inclusivity.
- **Follow up sessions** may be used with smaller groups to personalise the learning from RSE group lessons. This may be targeted small group sessions, 1-1 as appropriate, or referrals to specific support staff. The provisions of the Equalities Act mean that **positive action** can and should be taken, to **address particular disadvantages** affecting one group because of a protected characteristic.
- Government RSHE guidance highlights that **'some pupils are more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and other issues due to the nature of their SEND'**, and that 'Relationships Education and RSE can also be particularly important subjects for some pupils; for example those with Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs or learning disabilities'.

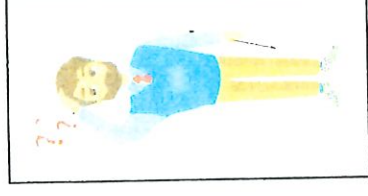


Managing Questions



- It can be **tempting to shy away** from awkward questions – or wrongly assume that these pupils will not need to know about certain areas of RSE. However, these young people can be particularly **vulnerable** to sexual abuse and non-consensual sexual experiences (three times as likely according to the NSPCC); they also have **the right to enjoy** safe, healthy relationships and positive sexual experiences with their own bodies and with other people's, the same as any human. Due to the nature of their needs pupils with SEND may be more **disinhibited** than mainstream peers and may ask explicit, intrusive or inappropriate questions.
- Establish **appropriate boundaries** as part of ground rules and ensure that staff teaching this subject can respond with confidence. If necessary, teachers can offer to **answer questions in a later session, and seek advice from colleagues**.
- Consider having a **box in which pupils can post anonymous questions** to be answered during the subsequent lesson. Be aware that this approach may exclude pupils who struggle with writing and these pupils may need support from a teaching assistant.

Approaches to Managing Challenging Questions & Inappropriate Behaviour



- Use a **matter-of-fact** approach and voice
- **Remain calm** and do not become 'jokey'
- Be **consistent** e.g. in your use of language and key messages
- Recognise the importance of being **age appropriate**
- Find an **appropriate**, if necessary private, space to respond to a pupil
- Focus on **answering the question asked/raised**
- **Clarify** what the person is asking if that is not clear, and **check that the learner feels that their question has been answered.**
- Remind pupils they can **discuss personal questions** or **tell you things after the lesson** if that feels more appropriate
- Be **clear about limits** on confidentiality and respect pupil's privacy
- You can **take time to give an answer** e.g. 'Let me have a think about that and we'll talk about it later'
- **Be aware of the safeguarding** policy and procedure if the issue raises such concerns

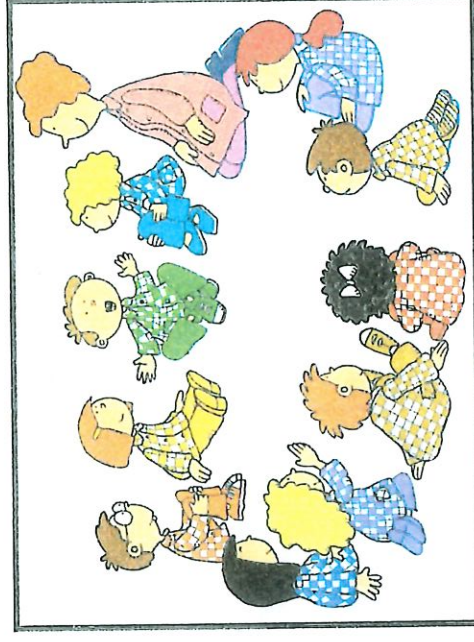


Consideration for Specific Areas of Need



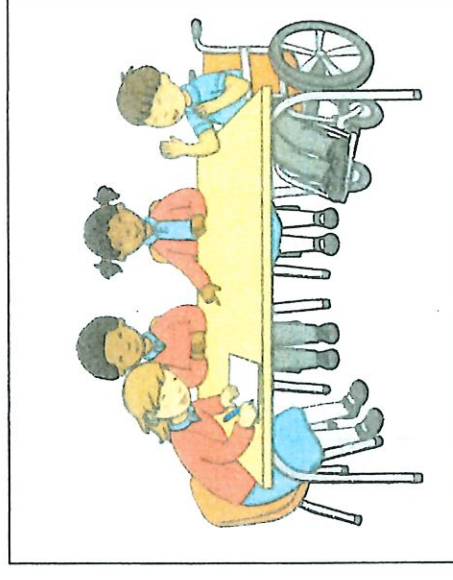
Communication & Interaction / ASD:

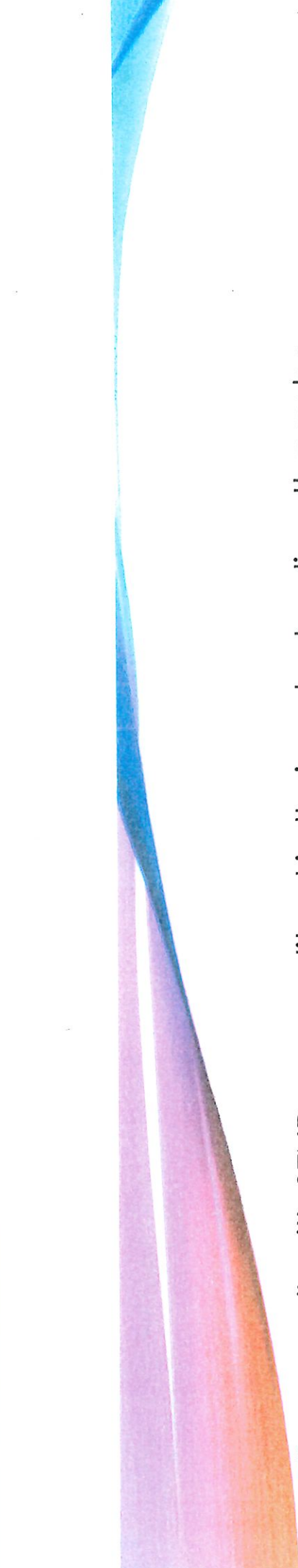
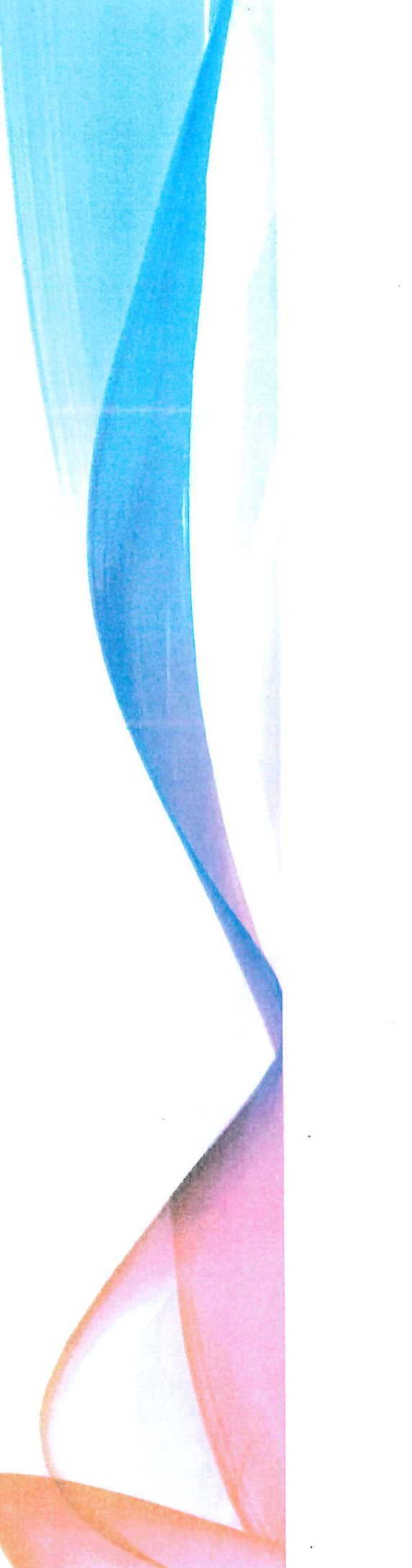
- Sometimes RSHE needs for pupils with Autistic Spectrum Conditions in mainstream schools can be overlooked as their **academic capabilities can mask their social and emotional needs**. Although they may understand the concrete information, work about relationships, consent and understanding risk and coercion can be very challenging for some young people on the spectrum.
- **Individual sessions or small group provision** in addition to mainstream classes can be beneficial to address this. There is likely to be a higher incidence of 'social masking' and this should be taken into consideration when evaluating the effectiveness of teaching and whether pupils have understood the nuances of social and appropriate intimate relationships.



Cognition & Learning:

- Be mindful that **cognitive development will not necessarily correspond to chronological age or key stage and physical development may be ahead of cognitive development**. This can be particularly relevant to topics regarding puberty and may increase the likelihood of abuse.
- Topics will need to be **broken down** and taught over a longer period of time. Reduce the amount of content in each lesson, and **focus on a key question or theme** (e.g. What is a healthy relationship?).
- Provide opportunities for **repetition** to **revisit** prior learning.
- Make use of **visuals** to support understanding.
- **Assess pupils with SEND** in a lesson and consider whether approaches may need to favour discussion and other approaches over written work. Practical demonstrations by the pupils may be necessary to demonstrate understanding.



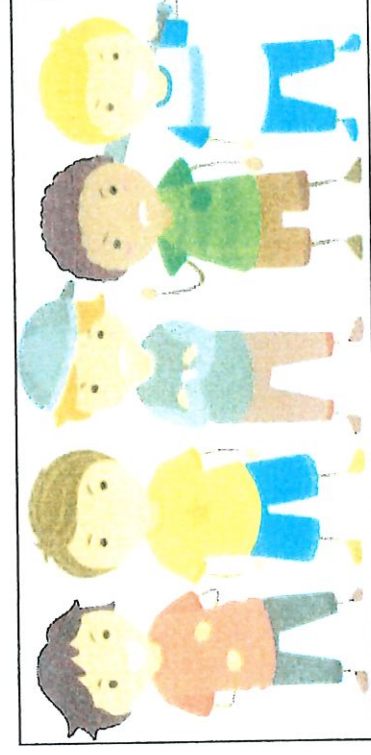
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- Some pupils with SEND are very literal in their understanding. It may be necessary to be more **explicit** with them and to **avoid euphemism**.
 - Activities need to be **practical** and, wherever possible, performed in **context/in situ**. **Reinforce key concepts** from lessons at other times. For example, discuss healthy food choices at lunchtime or personal hygiene after PE lessons.
 - Try to **refer to emotions as pupils are experiencing them**. For example, highlight the difference in emotions felt after breaktime to those after a long lesson. **Tools and visual aids** may help pupils who struggle with emotional learning to express themselves.
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SEMH:

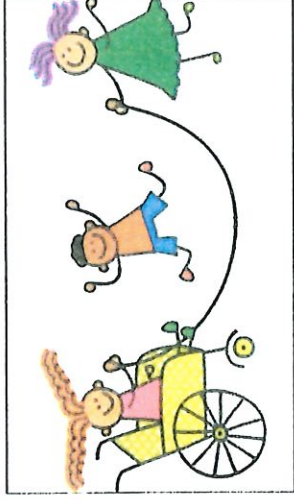
- Pupils who have social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) issues may find RSE education difficult. Their **existing challenges** with engaging in social situations, dislike of change and difficulties around forming healthy, trusting relationships can all be barriers.
- Some SEMH pupils have an “**act tough**” persona – which may well have helped them to survive in past traumatic experiences. Teachers need to realise that the bravado and claimed expertise around sex **could be hiding lack of knowledge, fear or even a disclosure about past abuse**. Creating **safe spaces** for these pupils to learn RSE is vital, and staff need to be **sensitive to possible triggers**, safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures.
- Some children with learning difficulties **can lack social barriers** and may be very explicit in discussions – teachers need to be sufficiently **experienced and confident** to handle this safely while still encouraging pupils to engage and ask questions.

- Developing a **sensitive teaching style** will be key to ensuring all pupils feel safe and supported in lessons and able to engage with the key messages.
- **Consideration** needs to be taken for those who will be **emotionally dysregulated** by the information shared. Such pupils should be offered **timeout cards** to support them to emotionally regulate and attend to their learning. Use **zones of regulation** or similar approaches to encourage those pupils to articulate how they may be feeling and to take appropriate steps to support them to remain in the lesson.



Sensory &/Physical:

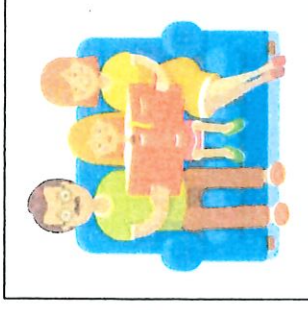
- Physical disability may impact on every aspect of an individual's life including how they socialise, develop relationships and have sex.
- Pupils with a physical disability may have to find **different ways** to communicate, take part in learning and everyday activities: including making friends and socialising with others. They may have **anxiety** about a different body shape or image, worry about how their body works and what others may think. They may have **additional worries** or questions about puberty, how they can have sex and whether they can have children. They may not have the **opportunity to talk about these things with others with similar needs**.
- It is important that these pupils have **access to RSE alongside their peers** as well as additional **opportunities to explore questions** that the RSE curriculum may raise for them. These conversations should take place in a **safe space** with a **trusted and informed adult** with **access** to appropriate, high quality information and resources specific to their needs and requirements. Sometimes it may be helpful if **medical advice** is sought by the family and shared as appropriate with the school to aid the planning and delivery of RSE with the **consent of the young person**.



- When teaching pupils with **visual impairments**, use high-quality, realistic resources and models that they can explore by touch. Support this with detailed verbal descriptions. BBC Radio 4 has a useful discussion on RSE for visually impaired pupils (2018). And the RNIB shares information about 3D models that can be printed (2017).
- Consider carefully how to **adapt lessons for pupils with sensory impairments**. For example, how can pupils with visual impairments learn how to put on a condom safely, how will they know what other people's bodies are like?
- Pupils with **sensory impairments can miss nonverbal visual or auditory cues**. They may be **unable to discern other people's emotions** from their facial expressions or vocal tone, or they may miss parts of group conversations.
- These and other related factors can lead to **difficulties in social communication** and **misinterpretations** by their peers. In turn this can lead such pupils to withdraw from social situations and to experience feelings of uselessness.

The Importance of Involving Parents & Carers

- Good quality RHSE for pupils with SEND is dependent on parental engagement so that messages can be reinforced in all settings. **Communicate regularly** with parents and carers and keep them informed on upcoming topics. **Consider running a Q&A meeting especially for parents of pupils with SEND.**
- Discuss the **importance of teaching about healthy relationships**, especially for pupils with SEND. Explain that the focus of this teaching is on how to stay safe in a relationship, what constitutes a healthy relationship and coercive relationships.
- To consolidate learning, **send home simple straightforward 'homework' to help parents and carers to support pupils.** An example may be a card sort with visuals: what is/is not a good friend. Consider providing support to help parents and carers to answer difficult questions or to understand risks.



Final Top Tips:

- Establish **early partnership with parents/ carers**. These early partnerships are crucial in delivering consistent, clear messages to pupils and supporting family engagement with RSE.
- Always use **correct language** for private body parts.
- **Identify effective curriculum models** for general delivery but also recognise that **work often responds to an individual's needs**, specifically focused and planned.
- **Listen to children and young people** – identify their needs and create a balance alongside understanding the perspectives of families.

- Use **accessible words**
- Do **not** use jargon words, difficult phrases or slang
- **Break information down**
- Go at a **slower pace**
- Give **breaks**
- Keeping **checking child's understanding**
- Give **examples**
- Give **extra time**
- Do **not patronise**

