

The New Approach to Sexual Health & Relationships Education in East Dunbartonshire Schools

Frequently Asked Questions

Where has the idea for this new approach come from?

This new approach to sexual health and relationships education (SHRE) was the result of a comprehensive piece of work carried out in Glasgow City Council, in partnership with NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde. After a very positive evaluation of the programme was carried out the Sexual Health Strategy Group for East Dunbartonshire agreed that this would be a very useful programme to use in schools across East Dunbartonshire.

Why was there a need for a new approach?

Research suggests a range of concerns about young people's behaviours and attitudes, the risks that they are exposed to and the supports available to them. East Dunbartonshire Council is committed to contributing to improving the sexual health and wellbeing of the young people in East Dunbartonshire. The delivery of sexual health and relationships education in schools is clearly an area of importance. It is clear that school based practice is not consistent across East Dunbartonshire i.e. what is being taught, when topics are being taught and how well parents and carers were informed about matters. The new approach to SHRE:

- Includes a wider range of subjects e.g. dealing with relationships, safety, developing skills etc.
- Will be delivered by trained and confident teaching staff.
- Aims to encourage parents and carers to become more involved in their children's SHRE learning.
- Will provide additional age appropriate information to accompany lessons
- Will provide, for older pupils, information about services.

How was this new approach developed?

This new approach to SHRE has been developed over a number of years and is based on national 'good practice' and research evidence. This programme was initially tested out in two Learning Communities in Glasgow City in 2007/8. The views of parents and carers, pupils and teachers were independently evaluated by an external company. The subsequent report (which can be accessed at www.sandyford.org) was very positive and gave suggestions for future improvements. Amendments have subsequently been made in light of the evaluation and the comprehensive programme is ready to be used across both the primary and secondary sector.

What is so 'new' about this approach?

The new approach to SHRE in schools is a more comprehensive approach than that which previously existed. Also, it is much more than what is taught in the classroom. It has three key themes:

- Improving what is delivered in the classroom.
- Raising the level of involvement of parents and carers in their children's learning.
- Ensuring that young people have access to age-appropriate wider information and services.

Still delivered as part of Personal & Social Education (PSE) the new approach includes:

- A more open approach to SHRE learning.
- New 5-18 curriculum materials.
- Improved ways of involving parents and carers to become active in their children's learning.
- The development of accompanying booklets for P6-S4 pupils called 'The Wee Book of Life, Love and Living'.
- Improved links with community-based resources for older pupils.

What types of messages are given in this new approach?

Some of the elements of this new approach aren't really new at all but are based on existing national policy and local good practice. However there are some aspects that are either new or which receive a greater emphasis. Some of these include:

- Promoting the idea of ‘delay’ i.e. that young people should be encouraged to delay engaging in sexual activity until they are physically and emotionally equipped to deal with it and its consequences.
- A deliberate use of the term sexual health and relationships to emphasise that this is much more than teaching about ‘sex and contraception’. Considerable space is given to looking at emotions, friendships, relationships and values etc.
- Issues of personal safety run throughout the curriculum and vary depending on the pupils’ stage of development. They include privacy, use of technologies, assertiveness, seeking help etc.
- Gender differences are another recurring theme in which the different experiences of boys and girls and negative stereotypes are addressed.
- Materials celebrate diversity and acknowledge that children come from and experience different backgrounds and circumstances.
- Children are encouraged to know and use the correct names for body parts so that they learn to use them in a factual way, devoid of embarrassment or shame.

Will there be a difference in what is taught at primary and secondary level?

The short answer to this is ‘yes’. The curriculum material has been written in a way that each year is a building block for future years. A great deal of effort has been made to ensure that the material is age and stage appropriate. It closely follows national guidance in respect of what should be taught and when.

Although the overall programme is called ‘sexual health & relationships education’, at early primary level the emphasis is very much on ‘relationships’, focusing on family, friendships, caring for people and things etc. At P5 the names for sexual organs and reproduction are introduced and in P6 and P7 issues about puberty and its emotional consequences are dealt with.

At secondary level, there are again strong ‘relationships’ and ‘emotions’ themes throughout. There is also an emphasis on encouraging young people to ‘delay’ engaging in sexual activity until they are ready to deal with its physical and emotional consequences. It is in S3 when issues about sexual activity and protection are introduced.

What will this new approach mean for my child?

The evidence from the pilot year clearly highlights how much the children enjoyed the new class-room materials and it is hoped that children will begin to discuss age-appropriate issues at home. As students get older and begin to develop a level of maturity, it is hoped that the new approach will help them think about who they want to be, what they want from relationships and to appreciate that they have choices and control over what happens in their lives.

What will this new approach mean for me as a parent/carer?

The new approach to SHRE has been designed to both improve communication between schools and parents and carers and to improve the involvement of parents and carers in their children’s learning.

In relation to improved communication between schools and parents and carers you should, along with the information, receive an invitation to attend an information session at the school where you can view the material your child will be taught. The school will also be happy to answer any questions you might have.

You will also be able to get a preview of the two new elements that have been introduced to help parents and carers discuss SHRE issues with their children. The first of these are home activity exercises attached to lessons for pupils in P6-S4. They do not require specialist knowledge or involve loads of writing. Hopefully they will assist you and your child to share views and opinions in a natural and comfortable way. Once these activities have been completed a tear-off slip needs to be signed by you and your child to say that the exercise has been completed. This slip then needs to be returned to school.

Secondly, your child will be given a booklet to accompany the learning they have received in the classroom. The Evaluation Report from the pilot year indicated that, not only were the booklets appreciated by pupils, but they were also a useful tool to kick-start discussions at home.