

Life course approach Healthy Sexual Development

Age and stage led acquisition of knowledge, understanding, attitudes, values and skills

Learning about growing up, sex and relationships starts at a very early age and should be built on developmentally to match the maturity of the child.

The key areas to be covered at each age are outlined below.

Age 3-6

At this age children are interested in forming friendships and talking about family. They want to know the differences between boys and girls, naming body parts, where babies come from. What areas of the body are private and who they can talk to if they are worried are also important.

Age 7-8

At this age children are interested in the emotional and physical changes of growing up, similarities and differences between boys and girls, coping with strong emotions and how babies are made from eggs and sperm. How to look after our bodies and how to be safe and healthy are also important.

Age 9-10

At this age children are interested in knowing about love and the different kinds of families, they will be curious about puberty and sexual feelings and changing body image. They will want more details about conception, how babies develop and are born and why families are important for having babies. They will also be interested in knowing about how people can get diseases, (including HIV), from sex and how they can be prevented. They will also want to know who they can talk to if they want help or advice and information about growing up.

Age 11-13

At this age most young people will be going through puberty and will be interested in hormones, how they will be affected by them, the menstrual cycle, wet dreams, erections, fertility, pregnancy – how it can be avoided, and safer sex. They also want to know if their physical development is 'normal'. Young teens also want to know about the difference between sexual attraction and love and what it means to be attracted/in love with someone of the same gender. Young people will be asking questions about relationships, when is the right time to have sex, how to avoid pressure and where they can get more information if they need it, including the best websites.

Age 13-16

At this age young people want to know about different types of relationships. They may want to know about how to cope with strong feelings and how to cope with the pressures to have sex. They will be interested to know what they should expect of a partner and how to talk to them. They will need more information on contraception, sexual health and how to access services and advice. They will start to ask questions about parenthood and may like to know how they can talk to their own parents or a trusted adult. Secondary age pupils will also be interested in other influences on sexual decision making such as the law, different cultures and religious beliefs, pornography, the media and the effects of drugs and alcohol. Most young people will not have sexual intercourse until they are at least 16 but statistics show that about a quarter of young people will have had sexual intercourse by the time they are 16.

Age 16-19

At this age young people are at the legal age of consent and many, but not all, will be in intimate relationships and will be interested to know about the challenges of long-term commitments and the qualities needed for successful loving relationships. They also need information about contraception and sexual health and how to access services.