Principles of excellence in relationships education

Updated 2022

In collaboration with inspirational practicing educators

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This set of principles will help you recognise and deliver excellent relationships education. It is based on official government requirements and research in this area. It has been developed by a group of leading relationships organisations and inspiring educators.

Excellent relationships education is inclusive of all families and individuals. When referring to inclusivity throughout The Principles and accompanying resources, this includes and is not limited to people and families that are from all races and cultures, abilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT+), single parent, adopted and/or care experienced, trauma-experienced, from all religions and beliefs, from all sexes and genders.

Why do relationships matter?

At their best, relationships help us feel happy, healthy and secure. They can protect us from the big challenges many of us experience, including mental and physical ill health and poverty. With the right support in place, relationships education is an opportunity for children and young people to develop the skills they need to have healthy and reliable relationships for life.

Only by experiencing these relationships can **children and young people** identify and practise healthy and reliable relationships in their own lives. This helps them learn to understand and regulate their emotions, behaving more appropriately. They can become more resilient and more supportive, empathetic and inclusive with one another. And with better relationships with peers and teachers, they can be more receptive learners, improving their future life chances.

With healthy and reliable relationships at the heart of what they do, **schools** can improve the wellbeing of the whole school community. A safe and open environment is the foundation for safeguarding pupils from issues like grooming, low self-esteem and abusive relationships, and multiple risk factors for domestic violence. Pupils with positive relationships are likely to do better academically. And improved staff relationships mean higher morale and retention.

There are wider benefits for **the community and society** too. Scientific evidence tells us when educators and families role model healthy and reliable relationships this contributes to more positive school communities. The economy also benefits from sustainable family units, regardless of their structure. And the empathy fostered builds a more equal, understanding and diverse society.

What are the principles of excellence in relationships education?

01
Educators feel supported, knowledgeable and confident to deliver relationships and sex education and role model healthy and reliable relationships.

02
Leaders champion and demonstrate a commitment to meaningful relationships learning and to high quality relationship education, which includes sex education.

03
Pupils have opportunities to understand healthy and reliable relationships through experiencing them.

04
Parents and staff role model positive relationships and honest communication.

05
An active relationships education policy is at the core of the school's culture and ethos.

06
A relationships education curriculum is the basis of personal, social and health education and crosses the wider curriculum.

07
The relationships education curriculum is relevant to the child or young person and prepares them for the community and society they will live in.

08
The policy and curriculum aim to improve relationships across the school community.

09
School practice reflects understanding of Public Sector Equality Duty, empathises with and accommodates diverse family needs, circumstances and structures, and pupils of all identities.

10
The school listens to and values pupils' views, supporting them to recognise unhealthy relationships and to develop their own relationship ambitions.

11
The school approaches behaviour as the communication of feelings and needs.

12
Progress is measured towards a better understanding of emotions and relationships for all.

Principles

Excellence in relationships education is guided by the following principles:

Policies

The relationships education policy

- is developed with the school community, resulting in a curriculum that has community support, meets statutory requirements and the needs of pupils as part of their communities and wider society.
- recognises developing relationship skills requires pupils experiencing them as well as learning about them in class, and outlines how the school will help the community role model healthy and reliable relationships.
- is considered in everything the school does, including teaching, recruitment, communications, and equality and inclusivity practices.
- is available as a pupil-friendly version that can be understood and acted on by all pupils.

All school policies

- reflect the relationships education policy, encouraging communication and collaboration.
- outline measures to communicate them, considering the school community's needs.

Quality of education (intent)

The school aims

- for relationships education to be central to its success and vision, mission and goals.
- for relationships education goals to be school community-wide and long term.
- to help pupils be more resilient and understand, empathise with and support each other, improving their happiness, health and security.
- for all pupils to understand what healthy and reliable relationships look and feel like, relevant to their age, needs, context and development.
- for pupils to understand commitment is the foundation of many relationships.
- for pupils to have the skills to understand, identify and seek support or help for unhealthy or unsafe relationships behaviours including early warning signs of abuse

The curriculum plan

- helps pupils to have their own relationship ambitions and encourages those who lack them.
- creates opportunities for relationship learning across the wider curriculum.
- reflects the potential relationship ambitions, needs, concerns and everyday realities of all pupils and their families.
- prepares pupils for relationships of all kinds, including healthy, fulfilling sexual relationships as well as risks such as abuse, coercion and grooming on and off-line
- is shaped by pupils through input, feedback and peer-to-peer education.

Quality of education (implementation)

- Pupils have opportunities to learn about relationships in relationships education lessons, across the wider curriculum and throughout the school day.
- Educators, supported by school leaders, consistently role model healthy and reliable relationships, responding to their pupils' needs.
- Relationships education teachers are supported to feel enthusiastic, knowledgeable and confident, able to engage pupils in the subject.
- Pupils have access to additional support, where appropriate, such as mentoring by a reliable peer or adult or through counselling.
- The school sources high-quality relationships education resources, considering government guidelines, pupils' needs and scientific evidence.
- The school makes appropriate use of peer-to-peer learning and pupil voice.
- The school develops positive relationships with service providers such as youth workers, pupil referral units and alternative provision, CAMHS, relevant third sector services, social workers and the police.
- Staff assess pupils' progress in relationships, behaviour and attitudes, not just knowledge.
- Educators understand that relationship education topics may be triggering to pupils. Both educators and pupils have access to support if this occurs

Behaviour and attitudes

- Relationship skills, such as listening and empathy, are encouraged across the school community in a supportive environment.
- The school's behaviour policy recognises feelings drive behaviour and sees behaviour as a form of communication and opportunity for learning.
- Preventative, restorative and relationship-based strategies for managing challenging behaviour are focused on helping pupils regulate their emotions and behaviour.
- Educators have a trauma-informed approach, understanding the links between pupils' relationship experiences and their behaviour and success in school.
- Staff aim to reduce disruption to learning for all pupils, including those who exhibit challenging behaviour, considering what needs this communicates.

Principles

Working with families

The school

- communicates how relationships education can help pupils have healthy and reliable relationships in their contexts, making them happier, healthier and more secure for life.
- gives families opportunities to meet and discuss relationships education openly.
- responds to families' needs and contexts, providing them with information and resources to support pupils.
- understands some families' relationships are not positive, and provides additional support to pupils and families where appropriate.
- supports pupils to share what they've learned with their families.
- treats families as partners with a shared goal of excellent outcomes for pupils.
- uses tools like Parentkind's Parent-Friendly Schools Blueprint' to embed strong relationships with families in all aspects of school life.

Families

- are supported to understand how to role model healthy and reliable relationships as their children's primary educators
- feel knowledgeable and trust the relationships education curriculum
- communicate openly and honestly to help staff build relationships with their children.

Leadership and management

Leaders and managers (Governance and Senior Executive)

- communicate to the school community that outstanding relationships education is essential for pupils' happiness, health and security, as well as educational success.
- understand the importance of healthy and reliable relationships for the school's success and embed them in the ethos, culture and values of the school.
- role model building and maintaining healthy and reliable relationships with everyone.
- consider relationships in decision making, including recruitment and retention, pastoral and tutoring systems, and performance management and reporting.
- source and provide training for staff to role model healthy and reliable relationships, relevant to the community's needs and reflecting how relationship learning happens.
- support staff to create a happy and productive work environment where all are comfortable to be their full, authentic selves.
- inspire others to take an active role in relationships education.
- create a culture which supports all staff to thrive in their work and family lives

Personal development

- Pupils have opportunities for relationship learning and to identify their relationships-based strengths.
- Pupils are encouraged to develop their relationship with themselves, including self-esteem, self-respect and self-worth.
- Pupils are supported to deal with relationships coming to an end.
- Pupils learn how the quality of their relationships can affect their character development, mental and physical health and wellbeing, and that of their families.
- The school helps pupils have their own relationship ambitions and develop the skills to achieve them through experience.

Equality and inclusivity

- Equality and inclusivity are reflected in the school's ethos, values and culture, and demonstrated in everything the school does, including its communications.
- School community members understand role modelling healthy and reliable relationships are vital for equality and inclusivity, and are encouraged to empathise with and support each other.
- School leaders consider the school community's changing needs and unite it through shared goals.
- The school provides appropriate support for pupils with special educational needs to understand what healthy and reliable relationships look like and stay safe.
- Staff are trained and supported to champion and role model equality and inclusivity.
- The school supports pupils from all family circumstances, considering unconscious biases and the inclusivity of its activities, imagery and communications.

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Parentkind have produced a Parent-Friendly Schools Blueprint that can be adapted for different school settings to successfully engage with parents. You can read it here: www.parentkind.org.uk/uploads/files/1/Page/Parent%20friendly%20school%20Blueprint.pdf

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thriving families for all

Fastn aims to improve the sustainability of families, whatever their circumstances or composition. We champion the development of relationship skills in childhood that sustain positive relationships and improved outcomes for life.

We do this by bringing people together and sparking new collaborations. We work with others to develop new resources and practices that help families to thrive and increase relationship ambition and attainment in the UK.

You can find out more about us at www.fastn.org

We're always keen to hear from others who share a commitment to The Principles outlined here. Or maybe you are delivering inspiring relationships education? If you'd like to collaborate or join us, we'd love to hear from you: info@fastn.org

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