**Relate response to the Department for Education ‘Changes to the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education and PSHE’ call for evidence**

**For each of the questions below, we will only be able to read the first 250 words of your answer – please be concise.**

**1. Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

Relate believes – rooted in our 80 years’ clinical experience delivering relationship support services (including relationship education) to children, young people and adults, as well as research – that the most important subject areas to include in primary schools are:

(1) Healthy relationships – including recognising positive, healthy and respectful relationships, and identifying when people are unkind, disrespectful or controlling; what it means to be a friend; challenging bullying and resisting peer pressure; boundaries and consent; self-respect and respect for others;

(2) The impact of backgrounds and early experiences in shaping behaviours and expectations of people, relationships and situations as well as the ways that behaviour is meaningful and can express what is going on in a person’s life; and

(3) The importance of good quality relationships for people’s physical and mental wellbeing, and how parental relationships and parental conflict negatively affects children. The Early Intervention Foundation has found that the quality of the inter-parental relationship is a ‘primary influence’ on children’s outcomes, for instance, and the extensive evidence on factors that affect wellbeing demonstrates that, as Prof Lord Layard has concluded: “In every study, family relationships are more important than any other single factor affecting our happiness … Of all the factors that affect happiness, your family life or other close relationship comes first.” (Layard, R. (2011) *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*)

**2. Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.**

Relate believes that the three most important subject areas in RSE in secondary schools are:

(1) Healthy and unhealthy relationships – including recognising positive, healthy, equal and respectful relationships, and identifying disrespectful, abusive or controlling/coercive behaviours; what it means to be a good friend/boyfriend/girlfriend; boundaries and consent; challenging bullying and resisting peer pressure; self-respect and respect for others; understanding and developing positive communication and conflict resolution skills; commitment and decision-making in relationships; staying safe – including safety online, cyber-bullying and ‘sexting’; diversity and difference; looking after one’s sexual health; and knowledge of how to access support services.

(2) The impact of backgrounds and early experiences in shaping behaviours and expectations of people, relationships and situations as well as the ways that behaviour is meaningful and can express what is going on in a person’s life, and how relationship dynamics can affect people’s behaviour and experiences – including the factors that can affect and alter relationship dynamics and relationship quality.

(3) The promotion of positive, equal, good-quality, respectful relationships (including different types of relationships – family relationships, intimate/romantic relationships, sexual relationships, and friendships/social relationships) as a foundation of adults’ and children’s physical and mental wellbeing – including the impact of parental conflict negatively affects children and how young people when they become adults want to parent their own children if they have them.

**3. Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?**

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**4. How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?**

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**5. Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.**

Relationships and Sex Education is an essential component of PSHE, and should be an identifiable part of planned, timetabled PSHE education. Relate has long highlighted that the ideal place for RE/RSE is within PSHE, which should be made statutory to ensure it is not reduced purely to ‘drop down’ or off-timetable days. Good quality RE/RSE should be delivered as part of a wider curriculum promoting health, resilience, confidence, respect, and personal safety, both online and offline.

The impact and effectiveness of RSE and PSHE also depends on the confidence and competence of teachers: effective delivery requires staff who are specifically trained in RE/RSE and PSHE. Yet Sex Education Forum surveys have found just three per cent of teachers say RSE was covered adequately within teacher training, and seven out of ten say they need more training to teach the subject properly (<http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/media/28306/SRE-the-evidence-March-2015.pdf>). We would therefore urge the Government to commit a quantifiable resource to training, including delivered by organisations with expertise in relationships and relationships education, so that every primary and secondary school in England can access basic training in good practice RSE and PSHE. Expert and appropriate external Third Sector organisations such as Relate are also well-placed to be invited in to assist schools and supplement RE/RSE in schools to enhance and supplement the RE/RSE schools programmes. The Department for Education should develop standards for those delivering RSE and set an expectation that schools recognise that developing relational capability is an important function of education and a child’s future.

**6. Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.**

We would highlight the importance of linking RE/RSE and PSHE to wider wellbeing services, including counselling. Relate’s experience delivering Relationships Education programmes in schools is that teaching about healthy/unhealthy relationships, positive versus negative methods of conflict resolution, etc. can itself actually trigger emotional responses (for instance, children/young people reflecting on their family situations, or relationships with peers) that may require counselling support. Through our children’s and young people’s counselling service, Relate supported 7,800 children and young people, mostly in secondary schools, in 2016/17, and we know from this experience that relationship difficulties with families and with peers are a major factor in children and young people accessing counselling. Evaluations of counselling in UK secondary schools show family issues are the largest presenting issue (by a factor of almost two), (Cooper, M. (2009) Counselling in UK secondary schools: A comprehensive review of audit and evaluation data. Counselling and Psychotherapy Research 9(3)), while a survey of more than 42,000 children seen in Children and Young People’s IAPT (mental health) services found ‘Family relationship problems’ were the number one presenting problem as rated by clinicians (<http://www.newsavoypartnership.org/2017presentations/miranda-wolpert-updated.pdf>). The Government’s Green Paper on Children and Young People’s Mental Health recognises the link between family relationships (especially parental conflict) and children’s and young people’s mental health. Just as schools would not teach woodwork without a first aid kit on hand, so too we would argue that RSE/RE should be accompanied with access to counselling to deal with difficulties arising from relationships with family members or peers.

**7. How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?**

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