

Parenting policy

In line with the [World Health Organisation](#), FPA defines sexual health as a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free from coercion, discrimination and violence.¹

FPA believes parenting plays a vital role in promoting positive sexual health, development, behaviour and attitudes among children and young people, as such FPA believes appropriate support should be offered to parents.

A note on terminology

In this policy statement we use the term 'parents' to refer to the broad group of people who may fulfil the parenting role for children and young people. This may include, but is not limited to; parents, step-parents, grandparents, siblings, other family members, carers or foster carers.

FPA believes it is important that all work, information and materials to support parenting are made available to all people who may have this role of parent. We recognise the many different family structures within which parenting takes place, including lone parent families, same sex relationships, extended families, step-families, and foster families, and believe these different structures should be valued equally.

What do we believe?

- 1. Parents can play a crucial role in giving information and advice to children and young people about relationships and sex.**
- 2. Parents should be supported to talk to their children about relationships and sex. This should be done with the understanding that parents have unique knowledge about their own children, and that those who provide parenting support should base support on a partnership approach with parents.**
- 3. Parenting support should be easily accessible and it should acknowledge and meet the needs of different groups of parents.**
- 4. Schools should encourage parental involvement in the development of sex and relationships education policies within the school setting.**

¹ WHO, [Defining sexual health: Report of a technical consultation on sexual health, 28–31 January 2002](#). Geneva, 2006

5. We recognise that parenting can be difficult and that societal attitudes can create barriers for some parents in accessing information and support. It is also important to acknowledge that some parents may not have had good sex and relationships education themselves, and that this may have an effect on their perception of this subject.

Why we believe this?

1. ***Parents have a crucial role to play in the provision of information and advice to children and young people about sex and relationships.***

Parents have an important role to play in the provision of information and advice about sex and relationships to inform and educate as well as encourage risk moderation in children and young people.

Research shows children and young people from families in which sex and relationships are openly discussed are more likely to delay the age at which they first have sex, have fewer partners, and use contraception when they do have sex.² Citing a parent as the main source of information about sex is also associated with lower likelihood of unsafe sex or previous STI diagnosis.³

As well as having a positive impact on sexual health outcomes, children and young people report wanting to talk to their parents about sex and relationships, and vice versa, as evidenced by a 2008 review of literature.⁴ A 2015 study found that, second to school, young people report parents as their preferred source of additional information about sex and relationships⁵ whilst almost half of young people surveyed in 2014 felt responsibility for teaching about sex and relationships should be shared between parents and teachers.⁶

We recognise that some people find talking to children about sex embarrassing and uncomfortable. Some parents may also be hindered by gaps in knowledge and information. As such, FPA believes parents should be appropriately supported to talk to their children about sex and relationships.

² Ingham R, The development of an integrated model of sexual conduct amongst young people, 1997

³ Macdowall W, Jones KG, Tanton C, et al, [Associations between source of information about sex and sexual health outcomes in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles \(Natsal-3\)](#), BMJ Open, 2015

⁴ Turnball, T, [A review of parental involvement in sex education: The role for effective communication in British families](#). Health Education Journal, 67: 182-195, 2008

⁵ Tanton C, Jones KG, Macdowall W, et al [Patterns and trends in sources of information about sex among young people in Britain: evidence from three National Surveys of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles](#), BMJ Open, 2015

⁶ Parker I, [Young people, sex and relationships: the new norms](#). London: Institute for Public Policy Research, 2014.

2. Parents should be appropriately supported to talk to their children about sex and relationships. This should be done with the understanding that parents have unique knowledge about their own children. Those who provide parenting support do so on the basis of partnership.

Many parents will benefit from advice and support in order to be able to communicate with their children about sex and relationships.

However, it's important to recognise that parents have unique knowledge about their own children, and those who work with parents should establish a non-judgemental partnership approach. Support for parents can work in a number of different ways: identifying parents' needs, fears, concerns and hopes; providing a safe learning environment in which to deal with sensitive issues; helping parents access relevant information and support to aid them in providing sex education in the home; and developing parents' confidence, sensitivity and skills in relation to sex and relationships education.

3. Parenting support should be easily accessible and should acknowledge and meet the needs of different groups of parents.

Information should be disseminated to parents through existing communication channels, and should reach parents in places where they already go. Information of this kind is most effectively conveyed when parents are familiar with and trust the information source. Information must also be accessible to all parents, and materials should be developed which are suitable for parents, children and young people with a range of learning needs including low levels of literacy, those whose first language is not English and those with learning disabilities.

The different needs of different groups of parents must also be recognised. For example, fathers can play a very positive role in communicating with their children about sex and relationships, but different approaches may be needed to engage them effectively. Parents from different religious or ethnic minority groups may also need targeted approaches which recognise and work within their cultural norms.

4. FPA recognises that it can be difficult for some parents to talk to their children about sex and relationships or to access information and support.

Some parents will not be able to, or may choose not to communicate with their children about sex and relationships, and some children and young people may prefer not to talk to their parents about this subject. It's therefore important that parents, children and young people are supported and given information about where else to access information and advice about this subject.

Resources like [FPA's Parents Pack](#) and parenting support programmes such as the [FPA Speakeasy programme](#) can make a significant difference to the way that

parents communicate with their children about sex and relationships. Speakeasy is an education programme that provides parents with the skills and confidence needed to talk to their children about sex. The content is needs-led, parents actively influence and shape the sessions, and coursework is eligible for accreditation through the Open College Network.

Programmes such as Speakeasy not only help parents in their communication with their children, but can also have a positive impact on parents' own learning and confidence levels, therefore, it is important that they are made available to all parents.

5. ***Schools should involve parents in the development of relationships and sex education policies within the school setting.***

The vast majority of parents support the teaching of RSE in schools. A 2013 NAHT survey, for example, found that 88% of the parents of school-aged pupils want RSE to be taught in all schools.⁷

Whilst widespread support for the teaching of RSE in schools amongst parents is positive, FPA believes schools should encourage the involvement of parents in the development of RSE policies and parents should be made aware of the content of RSE in schools, through the publication of a clear statement of their policy.

This not only provides parents with necessary information about what their children will be taught, but case studies show that the familiarisation of parents with materials has the potential to enhance RSE, by improving coherence between educators' and parents' messages to children about sex and relationships, increased discussion of RSE topics in parent-child conversations.⁸

Further information

- FPA: [Policy Statement on RSE](#)
- FPA: [Further information on speakeasy course](#)
- FPA: [The Parents Pack](#)

⁷ NAHT, Research commissioned by the National Association of Head Teachers, April 2013

⁸ Alldred P, Fox N, and Kulpa R, [Engaging parents with sex and relationship education: A UK primary school case study](#). *Health Education Journal*, 2016, 75(7).