



Response to:
**Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum
Proposals for a new legislative framework**

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**MAE POB PLENTYNDOD WERTH BRWYDRO DROS
EVERY CHILDHOOD IS WORTH FIGHTING FOR**

About the NSPCC

We're leading the fight against child abuse in the UK and Channel Islands. We help children who've been abused to rebuild their lives, we protect children at risk, and we find the best ways of preventing child abuse from ever happening. Learning about what works in the fight against abuse and neglect is central to what we do. We are committed to carrying out research and evaluation to make sure the approaches we're taking are the right ones and we share what we have learnt with partners. Abuse ruins childhood, but it can be prevented. That's why we're here. That's what drives all our work, and that's why – as long as there's abuse – we will fight for every childhood.

Summary of recommendations

- **There needs to be a greater emphasis on keeping children safe reflected in objectives for RSE and in the four purposes of the curriculum**
- **Children and young people should be explicitly taught about all areas of maltreatment, including bullying, child abuse, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, in an age and developmentally appropriate way**
- **RSE teaching should be coproduced with children and young people to ensure it is relevant to the challenges they face in their everyday lives**
- **Schools should actively engage with parents and learners when designing and delivering their RSE curriculum through workshops, open sessions, consultations and community representations**
- **Statutory Guidance on RSE should include appropriate language and example answers to common tricky questions that are relevant to the challenges children and young people face. The guidance should include examples of evidence-based resources on RSE**
- **Welsh Government should ensure that there are necessary resources available for funded CPD training to equip teachers with the knowledge and confidence for them to expertly deliver SRE**
- **Teacher training should include how to sensitively and appropriately respond to disclosures of abuse and interact with a child who is disclosing**

NSPCC Cymru/Wales is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government 'Our National Mission: A Transformational Curriculum, Proposals for a new legislative framework'. NSPCC Cymru/Wales has chosen to answer questions 6, 7, 11, and 22 as these are the areas most relevant to our work as the UK's leading charity specialising in children protection and the prevention of cruelty to children.

6. Do you agree with making age and developmentally appropriate RSE compulsory for 3-16 years?

Yes

NSPCC Cymru/Wales has long campaigned for the implementation of mandatory sex and relationships education as part of a statutory entitlement to Personal and Social Education (PSE) for all children and young people. We welcome the proposal to make age and developmentally appropriate RSE compulsory for 3-16 years.

NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and learning about keeping safe, healthy bodies and healthy relationships is a core entitlement all children should receive, and is best delivered as part of a whole school approach where it is embedded across the curriculum and in wider school policies, ethos, behaviours and communications.

If delivered effectively, RSE can be an important form of preventive education and early intervention which can help children develop the skills and attributes they need to understand and recognise what constitutes abuse, how to keep safe from abuse, and from whom and where to seek support. Effective RSE assists governments to implement Article 19 of the UNCRC, the responsibility to protect children from violence, abuse and neglect. The implementation of RSE should also lead to positive outcomes for helping children speak out and adults taking action to prevent and stop abuse. Good quality RSE is therefore crucial tool to safeguard children.

We welcome the emphasis on improving the profile, quality and consistency of RSE so that schools support learners to be individuals who form positive relationships. However, we are concerned that the emphasis on learners being **safe** is missing. NSPCC Cymru/Wales would like to see greater emphasis on keeping children safe reflected in objectives for RSE and in the four purposes. **We recommend that the fourth purpose is changed to 'Healthy, confident, and safe individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society' to reflect the importance of children and young people being safe.**

The emphasis on RSE nurturing and developing learners' understanding of the influences that can affect them, both positively and negatively, as they seek to develop and establish a range of respectful, healthy relationships is welcomed. As is the emphasis on a 'protective and preventative' RSE as stated in the Welsh Government 'Relationships and Sexuality Education in schools' Guidance. However, NSPCC Cymru/Wales feels that a focus on recognising abusive relationships, violence and issues regarding consent, is not enough to keep children safe from abuse and neglect. This content alone will not provide children and young people with sufficient knowledge about how to recognise all forms of child abuse and

neglect, much of which happens in the home. Many children are unable to recognise abusive behaviour and they may not know how and where to seek help. **To ensure that all children are kept safe, NSPCC Cymru/Wales recommends that all children and young people should be explicitly taught about all areas of maltreatment, including bullying, child abuse, domestic abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, in an age and developmentally appropriate way.**

It is possible to address sensitive topics directly, while also making sure content is age appropriate. NSPCC resources such as the [‘Speak Out. Stay Safe’](#) service, a free service available to all Primary School in the UK¹, the [Keeping Safe programme](#), which supports primary school age children to spot signs of abuse and know how to seek help from adults if they feel unsafe, and the [PANTS resource](#), demonstrates how keeping safe messages around sensitive topics can be delivered to children as young as 4.

It is welcomed that schools have greater flexibility in how and what they teach, meaning that RSE has the potential to be able to respond effectively to a wide range of issues in response to the lived experience of children and young people. However, to ensure that teaching around RSE reflects the realities of children and young people’s lives, **young people should be consulted on the issues they’re most impacted by and what kind of language and expression is most useful for supporting them to navigate current dilemmas.** This information should be used to inform the design of RSE provision. This consultation process needs to be regularly refreshed to remain relevant to the issues children and young people are facing. The [AGENDA toolkit](#)², is a bilingual online resource that safely and creatively supports children and young people to identify issues that matter to them in relation to a range of relationships and sexuality issues. It could be used in schools to identify the key issues that children and young people face, and coproduce RSE teachings around these realities.

In addition to coproducing RSE content with children and young people, **NSPCC Cymru/Wales, feels that schools should actively engage with parents/ carers when designing and delivering their RSE curriculum through workshops, open sessions, consultations and community representations.** Working closely with parents when planning and delivering RSE is an important step to ensuring that learning in school can be reinforced at home. Good communication between schools and parents can help to ensure that parents understand that RSE plays a key role in keeping children safe from harm. Engaging with parents/carers is vital when effectively embedding a whole school approach to RSE. The statutory guidance that

¹ Between April 2018 and February 2019, the Speak Out Stay Safe programme was delivered to 428 schools in Wales, and 73,811 children were taught about how to keep themselves safe. Since the NSPCC Schools Service first began in 2011, 85% of the 1,459 primary schools in Wales have been visited at least once by the Schools Service (NSPCC aims to visit every school every three years), and the NSPCC is working hard to reach the remaining 15% of schools to deliver this service.

² [AGENDA: A Young People’s Guide to Making Positive Relationships Matter](#), is an online tool-kit produced with young people for young people. It aims to support young people to safely and creatively raise awareness of gender inequalities, sexual harassment and violence in schools and communities. Agenda showcases examples of the work young people are already doing in order to inspire and support others to speak out about what matters to them. It includes a wide range of activities and resources. Issues covered include: addressing gender discrimination, consent, LGBT+ rights, bullying, street harassment, FGM, sexual exploitation, relationship violence and many more.

is being developed to set out the scope of RSE and help inform teaching and learning should include the need to engage with parents/carers about RSE and some suggestions about how to do this (e.g. via workshops, consultations).

Estyn's thematic review of Healthy Relationships Education in Wales³ found that teachers in Wales lacked the confidence and knowledge to effectively respond to the needs of learners. It is welcomed that statutory guidance will be developed which sets out the scope of RSE, to help inform teaching and learning and to give teachers the confidence and flexibility needed to deal with emerging social and technological factors that affect the health and wellbeing of children and young people. However, for teachers who don't specialise in these subjects, it will be very difficult to adapt a curriculum without a base level of knowledge of subject material; what is age-appropriate; and what is the most accessible language for classroom delivery. There is too much onus on teachers to get this right, without sufficient support. Some teachers will have no experience of teaching these subjects and may feel uncomfortable discussing the material.

It is important that the statutory guidance on RSE includes examples of appropriate language and example answers to common tricky questions that are relevant to the challenges children and young people face. It is also vital that the guidance equips teachers with the knowledge and skills to identify the difference between good evidence-based resources on RSE and those of dubious quality. **The guidance should include a list of reputable health and third sector organisations which provide resources that are evidence-based and medically accurate, such as, NSPCC, Brook, PSHE Association, Stonewall, Gendered Intelligence, Childline, ChildNet, Parent Zone, Great Man Initiative, RAP Project and Internet Matters.** This is particularly important given that resources with inaccurate, misleading or graphic content can cause harm to children, including vicarious trauma and distress.

Statutory Guidance on RSE alone is not sufficient for ensuring high-quality and consistency of these subjects. To ensure the delivery of high quality RSE, it is imperative that teachers receive regular training on RSE to feel confident in what they are delivering. **Welsh Government should ensure that there are necessary resources available for funded CPD training to equip teachers with the knowledge and confidence for them to expertly deliver RSE.** Failing to provide adequate training for teachers on RSE jeopardises a school's ability to deliver these subjects effectively. We fully support the recommendations from the Sex and Relationships Education Expert Panel Report about the need for establishing an SRE professional development pathway, all schools having a specialist trained SRE lead and each local authority having a dedicated SRE lead⁴.

In addition to helping children and young people develop the skills and attributes to recognise what constitutes abuse, RSE and good preventative education should

³ Estyn (2017) A review of healthy relationships education. Accessed via:

<https://www.estyn.gov.wales/sites/default/files/documents/A%20review%20of%20healthy%20relationships%20education.pdf> – 19/03/19

⁴ <https://beta.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/the-future-of-the-sex-and-relationships-education-curriculum-in-wales.pdf> - 19/03/19

support young people to speak out about abuse earlier and give them the confidence to report it. NSPCC research shows that many children lack the skills, confidence and knowledge to seek help if they are abused⁵. Children and young people find it very difficult to speak out about their experiences of abuse and neglect and many delay telling someone what has happened to them⁶. Young people need support from adults to speak out about abuse. Research has shown that when children and young people do speak out about abuse, adults don't always recognise, understand or react appropriately when a child or young person starts to tell them about experiences of abuse⁷. This can mean that the child doesn't get the support they need. It is vital that adults who work with children are equipped with tools to help spot signs and symptoms of abuse, engage in purposive conversations, and are confident taking action and supporting children through the disclosure journey.

Recently, the NSPCC has worked with cross sector professionals who work with children to find out how they can be better supported to respond to disclosures of abuse⁸. Adults told the NSPCC that they aren't always confident about knowing what to say and do if a child starts to disclose. In response, the NSPCC has created an evidence-informed [bilingual poster](#) to help adults ensure children always feel listened to. Its visual and memorable and designed to help professionals remember some key interpersonal skills make it clear they are listening and taking a child seriously. The poster can be downloaded for free and displayed around schools. It is vital that children and young people see RSE a safe space to raise any issues and teachers should be trained in how to sensitively and appropriately respond to disclosures and interact with a child who is disclosing.

⁵ Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., Fisher, H., Bassett, C., Howat, N. and Collishaw, S. (2011). *Child Abuse and Neglect in the UK Today*. London: NSPCC.

⁶ Allnock, D. and Miller, P. (2013) No one noticed, no one heard: a study of disclosures of childhood abuse. London: NSPCC.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Baker, H. et al (2019) Let children know you're listening: the importance of an adult's interpersonal skills in helping to improve the child's experiences of disclosure. London: NSPCC.

Let children know you're listening

A **safeguarding resource** to help you show children and young people that, whatever they want to share, you're ready to listen. **There are three simple directions to remember...**

Show you care, help them **OPEN UP**

Give them your full attention and keep your body language open and encouraging. Be compassionate, be understanding and reassure them their feelings are important. Phrases like "you've shown such courage today" help.

Take your time, **SLOW DOWN**

Respect pauses and don't interrupt them – let them go at their own pace. Recognise and respond to their body language. And remember that it may take several conversations for them to share what's happened to them.

Show you understand, **REFLECT BACK**

Make it clear you're interested in what they're telling you. Reflect back what they've said to check your understanding – and use their language to show it's their experience.



NSPCC Learning

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For more training and resources to help protect children visit learning.nspcc.org.uk

7. Do you agree with the proposed changes to the guidance making power so that it is designed to secure that RSE is provided in a way that is age and developmentally appropriate to the children receiving it?

Yes

NSPCC Cymru/Wales welcome the proposed changes to ensure RSE is provided in a way that is age and developmentally appropriate to children receiving it. NSPCC Cymru/Wales believes that how children are taught is as important as what they are taught. It is vital that the teaching of RSE (and specifically the importance of keeping

safe, healthy bodies and healthy relationships) is introduced in an evidence-based, age and developmentally appropriate way from primary school onwards. Learning should be delivered through a spiral curriculum where a child's learning is developed and built on over time, in a way that reflects their increasingly independence, physical and social awareness, and experiences of the world.

NSPCC resources such as the Keeping Safe innovative programme, which is an evidence-based preventative education programme that aims to teach every child from 4-11 years messages to keep them safe from bullying, neglect, physical, emotional, sexual and domestic abuse, demonstrates how keeping safe messages around sensitive topics can be delivered to young children. The programme recognises that teachers and other school staff have developed expertise in teaching children and it utilises this expertise to teach the most sensitive messages to children they know, in the safe and supportive environment of the classroom. The programme has been delivered to approx. 7000 children in mainstream primary and special schools across two academic years in Northern Ireland. A Randomised Control Trial was used to test programme effectiveness. Outcome data has been collected from children, parents and teachers 3 times between 2016 and 2018. The last round of data collection was completed in June 2018. The preliminary analysis of the Children's data collected after 1 year of implementation has been completed and results so far are showing signs of positive significant differences in the knowledge and skills of children who have received the programme compared to those in the control group. The preliminary analysis of the teacher data indicates that teachers who have received the programme report significantly higher knowledge, comfort and confidence levels in teaching children Keeping Safe messages. NSPCC has set up a meeting in June with Welsh Government officials to explain more about the Keeping Safe programme. Please find attached a briefing on Keeping Safe in Appendix A.

Keeping Safe can be used alongside our other primary school support materials such as the [PANTS resource](#), our [Speak Out Stay Safe](#) resource, [Share Aware](#) and [Net Aware](#). These keeping safe messages are essential to give children the skills to stay safe at home, at school, with friends and online.

11. Should the right to withdraw from RE and RSE be retained?

No

NSPCC Cymru/Wales opposes the right to withdraw from RSE, as we believe that relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE), and learning about keeping safe, is a core entitlement all children should receive. NSPCC Cymru/Wales regards RSE, taught through a whole school approach, as an essential measure in preventing abuse, keeping children safe, and teaching them from whom and where to seek support. Not only is this learning an entitlement all children should receive, but trying to isolate RSE will be inherently difficult in practice within a whole school approach. Where Areas of Learning and Experience will be integrated across all subjects, meaning that discussions about relationships and sexuality could run through subjects such as literature, history and geography, trying to unpick RSE teaching so

that children and young people could be withdrawn, would be extremely difficult. As previously mentioned, parents should be meaningfully engaged with RSE and supported to understand its place within a whole-school approach to safeguarding.

Appendix A

Prevention education for primary schools: Keeping Safe

Keeping Safe is an innovative education programme commissioned by the Department of Education NI. This is the first whole school/ organisational development programme across the UK and Europe that seeks to embed the teaching of sensitive Keeping Safe messages into the schools safeguarding provision and all aspects of school life, impacting on the ethos and culture of the school organisation. It aims to teach every child in Primary 1 to Primary 7 class groups (age 4-11 yrs.) messages to keep them safe from bullying, neglect, physical, emotional, sexual, and domestic abuse. Recognised as a key component of the Department of Education Northern Ireland's child protection agenda, it was launched at Stormont by the Minister for Education Peter Weir on September 21st 2016. The programme recognises that teachers and other school staff have a developed expertise in teaching children and utilises this expertise to teach the most sensitive messages to children they know, in the safe and supportive environment of the classroom.

Developing Keeping Safe

Keeping Safe is a sustainable evidence based programme and as such has been shaped by the international research about effective school-based prevention programmes. This evidence tells us that programmes are most effective when they are whole school interventions, integrated across the curriculum, messages are age appropriate, presented incrementally and revisited, opportunities are provided to practice skills, and when parents are involved.

Keeping Safe has also been informed by a comprehensive needs assessment which was completed in 2011 by NSPCC on behalf of the Department of Education Northern Ireland. This work found significant gaps in children's knowledge and understanding in relation to keeping safe from sexual abuse and domestic abuse. Worryingly, children were unsure if they would be able to tell a trusted adult about domestic abuse or sexual abuse. Moreover, while teachers and parents recognised that children needed to be taught about keeping safe from abuse, they lacked the confidence to talk to children about these issues. They were unsure about the words to use and they didn't want to frighten children. They asked for training and suitable resources to build their skills and confidence to teach children about keeping safe from all forms of abuse.

In the development of Keeping Safe we have worked with the Department of Education (NI) and other key statutory and voluntary agencies, schools, parents and children to promote a public health approach to preventative education.

The Keeping Safe programme

The programme is a whole school programme with 3 key components:

A suite of teaching and learning resources to build the capacity of school staff to teach and reinforce sensitive messages through the formal and informal curriculum. The classroom based materials have been developed across three themes; healthy relationships, my body and being safe. They include a wide range of materials including 63 lesson plans incorporating ten animations, eight animated stories and 24 interactive activities. The resources have been specifically designed for each age group and lessons build on and extend prior learning. In practice 9 lessons (3 per term) will be delivered to each year group. Homework tasks have also been developed to engage and involve parents. Posters, wet break activities and 12 whole school/year or class assemblies have been developed to reinforce the messages being taught in class.

Training and ongoing support is available for all school staff; school leaders, teaching and non-teaching staff to build their capacity to teach the most sensitive keeping safe messages and embed the programme in all aspects of school life. This package includes three online modules concerned with introducing, embedding and delivering Keeping Safe in schools. Those leading the implementation of the programme in schools also receive one and a half days of face to face training to assist them in their role of embedding the programme in the ethos, policies, procedures and practice of their school. A further module, Adapting Keeping Safe has been developed for special sector schools. This module will help teachers in special schools adapt the programme to meet the needs of the children they teach. Communities of practice will be developed to provide further support to staff within and across schools as the programme is implemented.

Engagement with parents is built into the programme to ensure parents have a good understanding of the programme and have the knowledge, skills and confidence to reinforce messages that their children are receiving at school. Two workshops for parents based on NSPCC PANTS and the Share Aware materials have been developed and will be facilitated by NSPCC in schools. These have also been filmed and developed into video content for parents.

Evidence of effectiveness

The programme has been delivered to approx. 7000 children in mainstream primary and special schools across two academic years. A Randomised Control Trial was used to test programme effectiveness. Outcome data has been collected from children, parents and teachers 3 times between 2016 and 2018. The analysis has tracked change in the following outcomes across this 2 year period:

- Children's knowledge, understanding and skills to keep safe;
- Teachers' self-reported comfort and comfortableness in teaching keeping safe messages; and
- Parents' self-reported confidence to communicate with their child about keeping safe messages.

The last round of data collection was completed in June 2018. The preliminary analysis of the Children's data collected after 1 year of implementation has been completed and results so far are showing signs of positive significant differences in the knowledge and skills of children who have received the programme compared to those in the control group. The preliminary analysis of the teacher data indicates that teachers who have received the programme report significantly higher knowledge, comfort and confidence levels in teaching children Keeping Safe messages.

Alongside the RCT a small-scale process evaluation was undertaken to identify the key mechanisms and contextual factors that enable and support effective implementation of Keeping safe in the classroom and at the level of the whole school. Interim analysis of the process evaluation data indicates that Keeping Safe has been very well received by, and is highly regarded by school level stakeholders including Governors, leadership, classroom teachers, learning assistants and parents. Moreover, children report responding positively to, and enjoying programme lessons, assemblies, and homeworks. Key enablers of early programme implementation include access to a structured pre-prepared and well-resourced programme, school commitment to and ethos of safeguarding the welfare of their pupils, creation of a designated programme lead to champion the implementation of Keeping Safe in school, resourcing/prioritising of staff training through school development days and the availability of tailored NSPCC support to troubleshoot.

This evaluation will provide key learning for programme refinement, wider roll out and scale up. This pilot is one of the largest of its type in the world and has the potential to influence the education system in Northern Ireland, the United Kingdom and international good practice.

