

Fifth and Sixth Class - Resource Materials for Relationships and Sexuality Education (Department of Education & Skills)**An Introduction to the Fifth and Sixth Class RSE Curriculum**

At primary level, RSE aims to help children learn about their own development and about their friendships and relationships with others. This work will be based on developing a good self-image, promoting respect for themselves and others and providing them with appropriate information. The themes for Fifth and Sixth Class are as follows:

<p>5th Class</p> <p>The Person I Am Different Kinds of Friends My Family Keeping Safe Feelings and Emotions My Body Grows and Changes The Wonder of New Life Caring for New Life Making Healthy Decisions</p>	<p>6th Class</p> <p>Me and My Aspirations Different Kinds of Love Families Keeping Safe and Healthy Feelings and Emotions Growing and Changing Relationships and New Life A Baby is a Miracle Choices and Decision-Making</p>
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Moving into adolescence is a time of challenge and change for the young person. Changes take place physically, psychologically and socially. These changes are unique to each young person. It can be a very confusing time for children. Their bodies are changing, friends are becoming more important and their thoughts and feelings are maturing.

It is natural for parents/guardians to want to teach, protect and help their children to prepare for adult life. Parents themselves may recall their own experiences of learning about their growth and development. In the past, matters to do with relationships and sexuality may not have been discussed as openly as they are now. On the other hand, parents/guardians can have concerns about the wide range of information actually available to children today. Television, videos, advertising books, magazines, computers and of course friends, are sources of information and influence about relationships and sexuality. Many parents may not even be aware of, or indeed may not like, some of the messages their children are getting from these sources. The partnership approach between home and school in RSE will assist children in making healthy informed decisions and developing positive attitudes and values. The ordinary events of family life provide many opportunities for open communication to be established between parents and their children. Building on this foundation, parents/guardians will find it easier to discuss the more sensitive aspects of human sexuality, including puberty, conception and birth. As a parent, you know what is important for your child to learn as s/he approaches adolescence and there are many books and videos available which you might find useful and which may give you more comfort and confidence in this work. People have individual preferences in regard to books so it is important that you read the books before you discuss them or make them available to your child. Your school may also have resources for parents/guardians, as can your local library or book shop.

Throughout fifth and sixth class, there will be ongoing communication between parents and school through the Home-School Links pages. We are including some brief information on the more sensitive aspects of RSE in these notes, as many parents will wish to discuss these with their children before they learn about them in school. Topics relating to human growth and development will be taught in the context of Social, Personal and Health Education. In this way, children will learn the necessary skills and develop attitudes that help to establish caring and respectful relationships. If you would like any details about the timetabling of specific topics, you can ask your class teacher for information.

Psychological, Emotional and Social Changes at Puberty

Friendships and relationships play an important role in the lives of children. They help children to develop their understanding of themselves and the social world in which they live. As girls and boys approach puberty, hormones are produced in the body and these bring about many changes. Boys and girls may find that their moods change quickly. Mood changes are almost like being on a stormy sea, one moment young people may feel very happy and the next they may feel lonely and sad.

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Boys and girls may experience conflicting feelings about wanting to remain a child and at the same time wanting to become an independent adult. They may wonder who they are and what is important to them. These changes can be exciting, but sometimes they can leave them feeling confused.

As children go through puberty, they often test the boundaries of their relationship with their parents and this can result in conflict. Children may want a new, more adult relationship with their parents but are unsure how to achieve it. Parents are also learning to live with their child as a more grown up person. It is important that children have supportive relationships with people they can trust such as parents, teachers and friends. This will help them to cope with the psychological and social changes more easily.

Physical Changes at Puberty

Some boys and girls begin the physical changes of puberty as early as 9 or 10 years of age and others do not begin changing until they are 15 or 16 years old. Parents need to reassure their children that they are normal whether they start puberty early or late. On average, boys begin puberty about a year later than girls. Changes which are common to girls and boys during puberty include physical growth, change in the voice, increase in body hair and skin changes.

Girls Growing Up

The following changes generally occur in girls during puberty:

- Breasts develop
- Menstruation/periods begin
- A growth spurt occurs
- Underarm and pubic hair begin to grow
- Hips broaden
- Perspiration may increase
- Oily skin and pimples may develop.

Parents will need to prepare their daughter in advance for the changes that take place in puberty especially menstruation. It can be a frightening experience for a girl if she is unprepared for her first period. Menstruation is a monthly discharge of blood from the womb. On average girls will have their first period between 11 and 13 years of age. Some girls will have periods as early as 9 and others as late as 16 years of age. In the beginning, periods are often irregular and generally it can take a few years for the cycle to regularise.

Boys Growing Up

The following changes generally occur in boys during puberty:

- A growth spurt occurs
- The testicles, scrotum and penis enlarge
- Pubic, facial and other body hair begin to grow
- The voice deepens
- Nocturnal emissions/'wet dreams' occur
- Perspiration may increase
- Oily skin and pimples may develop.

Sperm is made in the testicles which hang in a sac called the scrotum. The scrotum is located outside the body behind the penis. Sometimes when a boy is asleep, sperm is released from his body in fluid called semen. When ejaculation or emission of semen occurs during sleep, this is called a 'wet dream' or nocturnal emission. It is important to emphasise that 'wet dreams' are temporary and normal during puberty.

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Parents may need to reassure their son that the rate of growth in boys is not always even. For example, the legs may grow so fast that the muscles responsible for their movement may not be in total control and the boy may appear clumsy and uncoordinated. If boys are aware of this possibility, they are better able to cope. It is important that girls and boys are supported in all of their experiences and that changes at puberty are celebrated in the family.

The Creation of New Life

Children have many experiences of new life. These may include springtime; new growth in the garden; new pets at home or new animals on the farm; the arrival of a new baby brother or sister, cousin or neighbour. Their sense of awe and wonder at the simplest experience of new life is refreshing and may awaken in the adults around them an appreciation of even a green shoot inspiring. By educating children to understand new life and how it comes about, parents are encouraging them not to take these daily miracles for granted but to respect, value and cherish new life.

Becoming a Parent

Becoming a parent is perhaps the most responsible job that an adult can do in life and it is essential that a lot of thought and preparation is given to it in advance. For this reason, children who have come through puberty must be taught that while they may be physically able to have a baby, they are not ready emotionally or socially to take on this task.

Parents/guardians will ensure that their own religious and moral values will be central to what they teach at home. In the RSE programme in school, conception and birth are taught in the context of a loving, stable and committed relationship where new life is respected, valued and cherished. Equally each school will ensure that teaching about human reproduction and new life will be informed by its religious and moral ethos.

Conception

The most intimate expression of love is when a man and woman express their love for one another physically in sexual intercourse. During sexual intercourse the man and woman become physically close to one another and the man's penis enters the woman's vagina. This is a special experience for the man and woman and ideally happens in the context of a committed loving relationship as in marriage.

Every month a woman produces an ovum or egg in one of her ovaries. About mid way in a woman's menstrual cycle, the ovum is released from the ovary and travels along the fallopian tube. There are two fallopian tubes connecting the ovaries to the womb. If the ovum is fertilised by the woman having sexual intercourse during this time, conception can take place.

The fertilised egg makes its way to the womb and embeds itself in the soft lining where the growth of a baby begins. The woman's periods stop for the duration of the pregnancy. If conception does not take place, the ovum is shed from the body during the woman's period.

Caring for New Life: Before Birth

A baby needs a lot of care in its mother's womb where it will be for nine months. As the baby grows, it depends totally on its mother for food. The food is passed through a tube called the umbilical cord. Because the baby depends entirely on its mother for food, it is very important that she eats a healthy balanced diet and takes regular exercise and rest. Just as good things travel through the umbilical cord to the baby, other substances can pass through which may harm the baby. These include alcohol, drugs and nicotine from smoking.

Some viruses can also harm the development of the baby in the womb. The most common known virus is rubella or German Measles. In order to avoid getting German Measles while pregnant, all children around the age of twelve get the 'MMR' at school. This is an injection to immunise against measles, mumps and rubella.

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Caring for New Life: Birth

A baby spends on average nine months in its mother's womb before birth. When the baby is ready to be born muscles in the mother's abdomen contract and she feels some pain. This is often called 'labour pains'. The strong muscles help to push the baby out. The baby travels down through the vagina to begin a new life outside the womb. When born, the baby is able to breathe on its own and no longer needs the umbilical cord for nourishment. The doctor or midwife ties the cord and cuts it neatly. This is the site of the baby's navel or 'belly button'.

Caring for New Life: After Birth

After the baby is born s/he is now ready to feed by mouth. The mother is able to feed the baby herself with milk from her breasts. Breast milk contains the right ingredients in the correct quantities to help the baby grow and develop a healthy immune system. Some mothers prefer to bottle feed their babies. All baby foods are balanced nutritionally to meet the baby's needs. The baby also needs a lot of love and care from the moment s/he is born. Parents do this by cuddling, playing and talking to the baby. The birth of the baby will bring with it great opportunities and changes in the lives of the parents.

As a parent/guardian, you might discuss with your child the changes that s/he brought to your life and how different your life has become as a result. You may also have opportunities to observe the arrival of a new baby in your extended family or in a neighbour's home.

Summary

Education in relationships and sexuality is an ongoing process throughout your child's development. It is most effective when you and your school work together in partnership. Being close to your child during his or her journey through puberty will be challenging and rewarding for you and your child alike.

For further information go to http://www.healthpromotion.ie/health/inner/busy_bodies.