

LEARNING AT HOME:

Ideas for parents and carers about learning at Third and Fourth Level



Part of our learning with young people at school is about **relationships, being safe, growing up, their bodies, emotional wellbeing, gender, being a parent and sex and sexuality**. This is part of our Health and Wellbeing learning called ***Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood*** education.

When a young person is in 1st, 2nd and 3rd year at secondary school most will be learning at what we call Third or Fourth Level. Learning across two Levels at school means that the teacher can decide what is the best approach for the class or individual young person.

It might be that your child will benefit from learning some subjects at the earlier Second level – your child’s teacher can talk to you about this. The difference between Third and Fourth Level is that learning at Fourth Level develops some of the topics a bit more.

Your child is at secondary school now, but you remain your child’s first and most important teacher. With your child at school, there is the opportunity for parents/carers and schools to work together to help your child to learn. In the pages that follow we explore how you might support learning, there are also quotes from parents who have been asked about their child’s learning about relationships, sexual health and parenthood.

Learning about relationships

Most of our learning under the theme of ***Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood*** education is about relationships. At home you can do these things - some of these things are kind of obvious and you will be doing them day-to-day, we mention them just because they do back-up learning at school.

- **We are all unique!** There can be a lot of pressure on young people to fit -in, anything that is unique or special about them can be picked on rather than celebrated. When you chat together remind your child just how important and special they are. Talk about all the things they are good at and what you love about them. You can also have them think about what makes their brothers, sisters, cousins or friends unique and special.
- **Making and having friends.** At this age young people become more independent and their friendships become more important to them. This also means that ‘fall-outs’ become more common. This gets more complicated with social media. At home you can encourage your child to be friendly to others, to be kind and to do their best to not get involved in arguments and fall-outs – with your support they can learn to step-away, and turn off the phone. But when your child has a problem with a friend you can also spend time just talking and helping them to figure out the

best way to fix a problem – this can include speaking to someone at school to see if we can help too.

- **Loving relationships.** At this age young people may feel some pressure to have boyfriends/girlfriends. You may have already heard someone ask your child: *Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend yet?* This can get in the way of girls and boys simply being friends. At school we recognise that puberty means that children might start to develop feelings for others, and of course that's okay, but it would also be great if at school and at home we help children to simply be children and to have friendships with no pressure to be in relationships. When we learn about relationships at school it is about helping the young person to be confident about themselves and to imagine that when they are older, and ready for a relationship, this should be with someone who shows respect and care for them.

Here are some of the things other parents have said:

“Spoke about growing up, maturing love relationships, respect for opposite sex and what is acceptable in relationships.”

“We discuss the importance of communicating how you feel in any and all relationships and no matter what anyone else says, how you feel is valued and that you value how others feel too.”

“We talk to our son in general and sit at dinner as a family with his 20-year-old brother and chat about everything. These topics just come up as part of the conversation. We don't “have a talk” about this specifically because he would probably find that “a bit lame” (in his words). But I think we keep the lines of communication open and if he feels he wants to talk about anything I think he knows we are there for him.”

Learning about being safe

At this age an important area for learning is to help our children be safe, to recognise and trust their feelings, and to remember who to go to if they need to talk or get help. At home you could think about doing some of these things:

- **Social media and being safe and smart online.** At this age young people might be online more, doing homework, chatting to friends, playing games or watching YouTube. Young people want to be more independent online and will start to resist you having a say about what they do and where they go. At home, you can talk about how being online is like being in a place, and wherever you are you need to be and feel safe. You can help your child learn about what information not to share and about coming to you if something they see or hear upsets them. When we are learning about this at school, we will let you know and suggest some things you can look at with your child to help your family learn about being safe online.

- **Feeling safe and unsafe.** Young people at this age can be helped to recognise, understand and trust their feelings. We can help children to recognise feelings that they feel with their body (in a nervous tummy for example) and feelings in their head (when you just know something isn't right). Even if they can't always find the words, you can talk to your child about their feelings and what they feel when they are nervous, unhappy, worried or scared.
- **Different kinds of abuse and neglect that can happen in a relationship.** We all want the best for our children and for them to be carefree. At school we will learn about relationship abuse which can happen (grooming, sexual exploitation, partner control, coercion and violence) because we want them to understand these things are wrong, and that a young person or adult is never to blame if this happens to them. At home, when watching TV, or reading a book, these kinds of situations will come up – you can talk to your child and help them understand that every person has the right to be safe and cared for in their relationships.
- **What we mean by consent.** Consent means asking someone's permission to do something. We want young people to learn about the importance of consent *before* they get into personal or sexual relationships. We will share some information with you when we are learning about consent at school, but basically learning at home could also be about encouraging children to ask for permission for things and understand and accept when the answer is yes or no.
- **Pornography.** Unfortunately most young people this age will have seen some pornography. At home you can help your child understand that the sex they might see is not real, and that if they see something upsetting they can talk to you about it.
- **Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)** To help young people plan for healthy adult relationships we will tell them about STIs at school – at home you can learn about STIs too and when the time is right help young people to understand the importance of condoms.
- **Who they can go to for help and support.** Not only are you your child's first and most important teacher, you are also their most important support. At school we will encourage the young people to think about adults they trust and can go to if they have a question or worry – you can do this at home too. You can encourage your child to talk about adults in school that they like and trust. We will also introduce the young people to where they can go for confidential, good advice about sexual health which they might need when they are older.

Here are some of the things other parents have said:

"I like honesty with my child. Secrets are dangerous."

"I think we talk to him as an intelligent person about everything and these things just come up in the conversation. I don't see it as passing on our "wisdom" to our son. He has his own opinions and experiences and we respect that but we try to show and advise/discuss with him about what is the right way to behave and how to treat other people. We don't always agree, sometimes we have quite heated discussions but that is fine. We also learn from him it's a two way thing."

“I try to explain that sometimes I am a safer way of finding out the truth than their friends.”

“So school has opened it up, it’s the road we are on. I feel confident enough, think I know the score. Like with STIs, school prompted that. I didn’t have a clue at 13, but information is powerful.”

Learning about growing up and their body

By the time children get to the early years of secondary school there are changes happening to their bodies – they are growing up fast. At school, this means learning about puberty including how feelings change. All children will learn about physical changes, like what happens to their hair, skin, body shape, breasts, smell, periods (menstruation), erections and wet dreams. We will talk about personal hygiene.

- **Puberty: how the bodies of both girls and boys change as they grow.** At home you will be dealing with things like your child wanting privacy, being more independent and the early changes that come with puberty – both body changes and strong feelings. We understand that it might be a wee bit embarrassing to talk about some things at home, but at school we will do this in a very matter-of-fact way. It’s all about basic human development and happens to us all!

Here are some of the things other parents have said:

No one spoke to me about this and I feel awkward bringing the subject up.”

“Talking in an open way is best and making it a bit funny can help.”

“Unsure when the right time is to talk to my son about it... but realise now is the right time!”

“General talk in family. My daughter has had some health issues with regards to periods and as such I have taken her to the youth sexual health clinic and supported her. We try to be open and to “demystify” sexuality. It is a normal part of being human.”

Learning about emotional wellbeing

At school we understand that there are a lot of concerns about young people’s emotional wellbeing, sometimes called mental health and wellbeing. Young people will benefit from us being able to talk about this. At home you could think about doing some of these things:

- **Feeling emotional.** Strong emotions are part of puberty and growing up. This may be easier to say than do, but it helps to try to de-escalate any drama and give the young person space to calm down so that they can listen to what you both need to say. It is also helpful if we adults can help the young person to think about how to control their emotions, rather than be controlled by them. When a young person is withdrawn we also need to think about reminding them that we are there for them, and spotting the moment where a conversation is possible. If this is something we can work together on, then talk to someone at school.
- **Looking after ourselves and others.** It's important for young people to learn the importance of kindness – to others but also to be kind to themselves. There are so many pressures on them, especially online, that if we can talk about kindness at school and at home we can help young people remember the basics of good relationships with others.
- **Body image and the pressures on young people.** At school we will learn about the pressures young people face to look or behave in certain ways – this can come from peers and from social media. When you watch TV, or see things on social media, this can be a good conversation starter and as a parent you can help build your child's confidence about who they are.

Here are some of the things other parents have said:

“Just speak to her about how she doesn't have to be the same as others, that she is her own person.”

“Just be open and enter into discussions. I use soap operas to open up discussions about certain topics that they may have just watched on the TV.”

Learning about gender

At school we encourage children to be happy with who they are, with the kind of girl or boy they want to be. At school we will do our best to treat all children equally. At home you might want to consider these ideas:

- **Gender stereotypes and equality.** At home you could encourage boys and girls to share tasks. You can read books, watch films where women and men are not just stereotypes. And of course, you can encourage your boys and girls to be respectful of all others, regardless of gender.
- **Being a boy or a girl.** At home you can encourage your child to be who they want to be and to help them learn to respect other children whoever they are.
- **Sexual harassment.** Our schools, workplaces and communities should be free of all sexual harassment and so at school we will learn about how a person can experience this. At home you can also use stories on the news or TV programmes or films to help your child understand that sexual harassment is never the fault of the person experiencing it – and that it's good to talk and find help if it happens.

Here are some of the things other parents have said:

“It’s on TV, movies, magazines. But I’ve always said to her be your own person, that’s how I was brought up. Girls can get mentally pressured, dieting and stuff. Pop stars lead lives that aren’t good – alcohol, drugs. I don’t want her to make mistakes.”

“I’ll put him right about how to treat women, I want him to learn for himself but I’m there for him and through his experiences.”

“I’m teaching them to respect women, themselves, respect authority and develop their own style.”

“Talked about peer pressure and having the confidence to stand up for yourself and know you don’t have to do anything to prove yourself.”

Learning about sex and sexuality

When we talk about sex at school this is explained in a basic way. We learn about sex as part of adult loving relationships. We will help the young people learn that they have a right to be healthy, happy and safe in their personal relationships. We also explain what contraception and condoms are so that young people have accurate information.

- **The age of consent.** At school young people will learn that the age of consent is 16. This is explained as something that protects young people from older people. We know that some young people have sex before their 16th birthday – as a parent you can talk to your child about what you expect and want for them.
- **Contraception and condoms.** At home you can talk to your child about both topics, explaining that you are there for them when they need to think about these things for themselves. You can explore information about different choices about contraception online, we will share some good websites with you when we are learning about this at school.
- **Pressure and pleasure.** At school we will encourage young people to recognise the pressures that someone might put on them to have sex. We want them to know and be in charge of their body and choices. We want them to understand that sex is something important, that when it happens it should be a choice and should be pleasurable. As a parent you can talk to your child about what you hope for them and help them think about the choices they will make when that time comes.

Here are some of the things other parents have said:

“We discussed delaying having sex - explained about maturity and feeling cared for and maybe loved.”

“We talk about issues such as being gay, and sex abuse all the time, it is in the media so is already up for discussion.”

“We strongly believe that not having sex is an option, and are concerned that typically school-based education assumes that they will - we feel this is inappropriate - “not” having sex is a viable option (and in fact the best one as it reduces sexually transmitted infection risks massively too!)”

“We have open conversations. However, as above, we are encouraging them to choose the approach of not having sex, rather than expecting them to have safe sex, but do speak to them about what makes for safe sex.”

“At 14 we want to encourage him to think about condoms. Jokey at first, like in a Christmas present.”

“Regarding LGBT we talk to her using real life examples of people she knows and use our family values to make her realise importance of being true to yourself and being accepting of others and their differences.”

Learning about being a parent/carer

At primary school children learn about how life is created, about pregnancy and birth, and we will refresh this learning at secondary school. We also want young people to think ahead about the kind of parent they would like to be, if indeed they want to have children. You can also support this education about parenthood at home.

- **Being a parent and thinking about what kind of parent they would be.** Learning about being a parent helps young people understand what an important job this is. You can use personal experiences to help your child learn, helping them to understand and recognise all the things you do for them, from when they were a baby to the age they are now.
- **Important things about child development.** When you can, you can encourage your child – both boys and girls – to spend time with babies in the family and help them to notice and understand the importance of love, care and play.

The importance of listening and talking

Sometimes you just need to be in the right place at the right time. At those moments your child will show an emotion you pick up on, maybe they will look like they need to tell or ask you something, or maybe the question will just pop out. There’s no doubt being a parent or carer can be tough sometimes. But when you can, be there for the chat.

“It’s about talking about issues. He knows that he can come to me or other family members - I have told him there is not a topic that is off limits.”

Books for Reading Together

We have some of these books at school, others you should be able to borrow from the local Library – if they don't have them they might be able to order them for you.

"I purchased a book regarding puberty that explained in more detail all the changes that takes place as the child changes into adulthood. I only bought the book to save my son from being too embarrassed, but we do talk openly about emotions and sex, etc."

"She doesn't really want to listen and puts her fingers in her ears, so I buy books."

It's perfectly normal

Robie E. Harris and Michael Emberley (ISBN 978-0-763-62610-5)

A book about changing bodies, growing up, sex and sexual health.

Usborne facts of Life: Growing up

Susan Meredith (ISBN 0-7460-3142-4)

What's happening to me? Why is my body changing? Why do I feel different? A book all about adolescence, body changes and sex.

Personal Hygiene? What's that got to do with me?

Pat Crissey (ISBN 978-1-84310-796-5)

Introduces personal hygiene and teaches essential skills and creates good habits for life – from dragon breath to dirty fingernails to smelly armpits and more.

Let's Talk about Sex

Robie E. Harris (ISBN 978-1-84428-174-9)

A book that tells pre-teens and teenagers what they need to know about sex.

The Little Book of Growing Up

Vic Parker ISBN 978-0-340-93099-1

Everything you need to know about puberty and periods in one little book.

Everything you ever wanted to ask about willies and other boys' bits

Tricia Kreitman, Dr Neil Simpson, Dr Rosemary Jones (ISBN 1-85340-634-1)

All boys have questions and worries – the authors respond to these.

The Period Book (Everything you don't want to ask but need to know)

Karen Gravelle (ISBN 0-7499-1705-9)

A practical book that answers any questions about the physical, emotional and social changes that come with your period.

Living with a willy

Nick Fisher (ISBN 0-330-33248-1)

About boy's bodies and what happens to them

What's going on down there?

Karen Gravelle (ISBN 0-8027-7540-3)

Answers to questions boys find hard to ask

Stories for boys who dare to be different

Ben Brooks (ISBN 978-1-78747-198-6)

True tales of amazing boys (who became famous and not so famous men) who changed the world.

Goodnight stories for rebel girls

Elena Favilli and Francesca Cavallo (ISBN 978-0-141-98600-5)

The stories of heroic women (some famous and some not so famous) from around the world.