

**Barnardo's Scotland response to the  
draft guidance on the Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and  
Parenthood Education in Scottish Schools.**

**Summary**

- Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the refresh of the Relationship, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) guidance for schools, however we believe a more a comprehensive update is overdue.
- RSHP education should teach children and young people how to stay safe and how to recognise when behaviours within a relationship are not appropriate. Pupils should understand what sexual exploitation is, how to recognise the signs and how to avoid exploitative situations.
- Clarity is needed on the link between the recent Scottish Government Parenting Strategy and RSHP guidance. School pupils should gain an understanding of some of the core principles of childhood development from RSHP education.
- Although there should be flexibility for schools and teachers in the delivery of RSHP, there is strong evidence that many young people are not reaching satisfactory outcomes in terms of RSHP education.

**General Comments**

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Scottish Government's draft guidance on the Conduct of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education in Scottish Schools. We agree that RSHP should focus on equipping children and young people with the knowledge and skills to enable them to make safe, healthy, empowered choices about relationships.

However, whilst we recognise that the Marriage and Civil Partnerships Bill presents an immediate onus to review RSHP, we are disappointed that there is not a more full scale review of RSHP taking place given that the guidance is now 12 years old and there have been major changes in educational policy and practice over that period.

In addition there have been significant developments in technology over this period which have greatly affected the way young people develop relationships and communicate with each other. We would therefore call for a more comprehensive update of the guidance to take into account all the developments that have occurred over the last 12 years, and to keep pace with societal changes.

## **Child Sexual Exploitation**

Barnardo's Scotland has two services working on CSE issues, Safer Choices in Glasgow, and the FACE service (Fighting Against Child Exploitation) in Dundee. In addition, we have a sexually harmful behaviour service, Skylight/Lighthouse, in Edinburgh. Safer Choices, our largest CSE service, aims to help children and young people aged 18 years and under to identify risk and devise strategies to minimise harm, particularly in relation to sexual exploitation. Part of the work of the service involves undertaking prevention work in schools, both residential and mainstream.

The sexual exploitation of children and the increase in knowledge and awareness of this issue is something that RSHP guidance should take cognisance of; this includes the dangers associated with the internet and emerging technologies such as gaming devices, tablets, smart phones etc. Online relationships are now deeply imbedded in our culture and especially the everyday lives of our children and young people. RSHP should not solely teach pupils about physical, face to face relationships but also the kinds of relationships formed and fostered online, via social media websites such as facebook and twitter.

Practitioners, including teachers, need to have a clear understanding of what normal, age-appropriate sexual development means, in order to better identify those attitudes and behaviours that they should be concerned about. Sexual exploitation often occurs when a young person is targeted due to pre-existing vulnerabilities. This can be linked to bullying behaviours within educational settings, and peer recruitment into exploitative situations. Young people need to be taught within schools to respect themselves and their relationships. This should develop resilience, which enables them to resist being drawn into potentially exploitative situations. RSHP education should instil in them the confidence to discuss with a member of teaching staff or a trusted adult if they have concerns they may be involved in a relationship which is not healthy, respectful and responsible.

The consequences for children and young people of not receiving adequate information and education on relationships can be extremely negative. Children and young people who become victims of CSE are often targeted because they are vulnerable and can therefore be more easily manipulated. Younger children especially can be lured into exploitative situations by older people who convince them they are in a loving, stable, consensual relationship. More often than not, young people involved in CSE do not see themselves as victims; rather they believe they are in a healthy, adult relationship. These behaviours must be challenged through RSHP and children educated to recognise when relationships are exploitative.

Barnardo's Scotland welcomes the separate section on bullying within the guidance and appreciates its roots in the Scottish Government's Bullying Strategy. However, given the complexity of this issue and its links to CSE, the

final guidance needs to cover this area in greater detail. The term bullying is a complex one and children and young people can experience a wide variety of bullying behaviours including intimidation, physical abuse, emotional abuse, mental abuse, and sexual abuse. We feel that there is a missed opportunity within the guidance to challenge newly emerging sexualised behaviours which can lead to young people being drawn into CSE.

Recent studies show that 'sexting' is rife within many schools and this relatively new phenomenon is often used as an instrument for bullying behaviour. A worrying number of young people are being encouraged by their peers to send sexualised images of themselves which are often shown around to other pupils. This issue needs to be highlighted in the updated RSHP guidance. RSHP education should acknowledge that this kind of behaviour is not age-appropriate and can often lead on to children and young people finding themselves in more dangerous, exploitative situations.

### **Parenting Strategy**

Barnardo's Scotland recognises the important role parents play in helping their children develop. Our You First! Services work across Scotland with young parents to support the development of strong and positive attachment between parents and children. With this in mind, we are fully supportive of the Scottish Government's Parenting Strategy but believe more could be done within the updated RSHP guidance to highlight the importance of parenting.

The Parenting Strategy states that:

*'As a national level we are committed to doing more to enable our children and young people to develop healthy, positive relationships to prepare for possible future parenthood. Building on the Curriculum for Excellence we will develop plans for new activity'*

We would welcome greater clarity from the Scottish Government on the relationship between the updated RSHP guidance and this commitment within the Parenting Strategy.

The Scottish Government's Getting It Right For Every Child (GIRFEC) approach emphasises the importance of everyone playing a role in making Scotland the best place in the world to grow up. RSHP education provides an excellent starting point for promoting understanding of this. Barnardo's is of the view that RSHP should teach young people about child development, so that they understand the important aspects of a child's early development, including love, nurture, strong familial bonds and parental attachment. This will support the development of a culture of valuing children throughout Scotland's society, as well as standing individuals in good stead for when they have children of their own in later life.

## **Curriculum for Excellence**

We support the ambitions of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and acknowledge that it has been one of the drivers behind this refresh. We also support the shift in focus in order to frame RSHP within the context of 'relationships' and not 'sex education' as a starting point. However, we feel that more needs to be done to ensure that all children and young people receive a good standard of RSHP that allows them to achieve the appropriate outcomes, regardless of the local authorities they are learning in. It is welcome that schools and teachers are able to individualise the curriculum in terms of how pupils are supported to reach the appropriate outcomes, and this should continue. However, evidence suggests that many young people across Scotland are not achieving satisfactory and equitable outcomes and experiences when it comes to RSHP.

The Scottish Youth Parliament have produced figures that indicate children and young people are not satisfied with the level of RSHP they are receiving. Meanwhile, recent reports of Scottish Government statistics showed that pupil's awareness of sexual health, and understanding of key issues, including consent, is worryingly low. Barnardo's Scotland are concerned that children and young people are often forced to look elsewhere to find information about sex and relationships, such as peers, older young people and more troublingly the internet. If children and young people are looking to the internet, and more specifically porn websites, to learn about sex and relationships there is a danger they will develop warped views and attitudes about what a healthy, appropriate, sexual relationship is.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss any of the points raised in this response with the Scottish Government in order to help further inform the final guidance.

### **Contact**

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