Easy, expert tips for teaching LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships education to your kids at home during lockdown

LILY WAKEFIELD JANUARY 13, 2021

As the UK enters another national lockdown, the pandemic is continuing to cause disruption to many children, particularly when it comes to LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships education.

Last week, Boris Johnson announced that schools in England would move to remote learning until at least February half-term, excluding the children of key workers and vulnerable children, and schools in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will do the same until mid to late January.

While queer parents, parents of LGBT+ kids and allies were relieved when LGBT-inclusive relationships and sex education (RSE) became mandatory for UK schools in September this year, schools have been given “flexibility” on when they implement the new curriculum because of the coronavirus pandemic.

The mandatory RSE guidelines mean that every primary school child must learn about different types of families, including those with same-sex parents, and secondary school students must be taught about sexual orientation and gender identity.

OFSTED is carrying out a “phased return to inspection”, meaning that although the watchdog will initially comment on schools’ “readiness” to comply with the RSE guidance from the Department for Education, whether or not a school teaches about LGBT+ relationships “will not impact inspection judgments until the start of the summer term 2021”.

In schools that have begun teaching the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010 as they apply to relationships, kids may still be missing out.

While lockdowns have been causing disruption throughout the school year, even during the periods in which schools have remained open children must self-isolate and stay out of school if they have, or live with someone who has, coronavirus symptoms or a positive test.

Whatever access a child currently has to LGBT-inclusive RSE, experts told PinkNews that it is always beneficial to include LGBT+ identities in educational activities at home.

Learning about LGBT-inclusive relationships and sex education is important both at school and at home

Sidonie Bertrand-Shelton, head of education programmes at Stonewall, said: “Every child and young person deserves an education which celebrates diversity and teaches acceptance.”

Even if your child is already being taught LGBT-inclusive RSE by their school, Bertrand-Shelton said: “Teaching that is inclusive of lesbian, gay, bi and trans people can happen at home too, starting with some easy steps like teaching about LGBT+ role models like Frida Khalo.

“Or, in a maths lesson you can introduce LGBT+ people and families, for example by asking how two mums calculate a 10 per cent increase of their son’s pocket money.”

Gayathiri Kamalakanthan, from the School of Sexuality Education, which provides comprehensive and inclusive sex and relationships education workshops for young people in the UK, said that kids who are in self-isolation “still want and need information about relationships and sex”.

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Gayathiri Kamalakanthan, from the School of Sexuality Education, which provides comprehensive and inclusive sex and relationships education workshops for young people in the UK, said that kids who are in self-isolation “still want and need information about relationships and sex”.
Sexuality, gender fluidity, heteronormativity, periods, masturbation and porn consumption do not stop during self-isolation – so neither should learning about them accurately.

She said: “Learning about topics such as sexuality, gender, consent and healthy relationships now will shape their perception of the world and themselves.

“Even if a topic does not seem relevant now, it’s better for young people to have the information before they actually encounter issues.

“They will be able to make informed choices out of confidence and self-assuredness rather than out of insecurity. Sexuality, gender fluidity, heteronormativity, periods, masturbation and porn consumption do not stop during self-isolation – so neither should learning about them accurately.

“Topics such a digital sexual harassment, digital consent and ORpuberty might be especially relevant in this period of time whilst we are online more than ever before.”

Feeling uncomfortable is OK, but ‘shame and embarrassment’ must not be passed on

Kamalakanthan added that her advice to parents who feel too uncomfortable or uninformed to discuss sex and relationships with their kids would be to “spend time teaching yourself”, but added: “It’s important that we try our best not to pass on our learnt shame and embarrassment.”

“There are some really great, free resources online that can help heterosexual/cisgendered/uninformed parents talk to their kids about LGBT+ identities,” she said.

“It can seem daunting at first – there might be a lot of new vocabulary and it’s easy to confuse different terms. Let your kids know that you are learning with them.

“Tell them that it’s OK to get things wrong as long as you are willing to listen and learn from the people who are best placed to teach you.

“You might find that your child starts teaching you things and that’s great. Listening to what they have to say will empower them – they’ll want to keep learning alongside you.”

Watching videos by people who are comfortable talking about sex and relationships with your child will help you both say them to each other.

If a parent feels embarrassed, she said: “Acknowledging why you feel embarrassed and being open with your child about this if you can is a good place to start.

“Again, informing yourself first, can give you confidence before talking to your child. Saying something like, ‘talking about the body, sex and relationships is normal and healthy. I wasn’t always taught about it openly so hopefully I’ll get better as we speak about it together’, will allow your child to understand where you’re coming from.

“The more you practice saying specific words out loud, the more comfortable you will be with them. Watching videos by people who are comfortable talking about sex and relationships with your child will help you both say them to each other.”

Parents don’t need to have all the answers

While teaching kids about LGBT-inclusive sex and relationships at home is important, parents should not expect themselves to have the answers to everything.
“Be honest,” said Kamalakanthan. “It’s important that your child knows that you are not perfect and that you don’t know all the answers.

“In modelling vulnerability and a willingness to learn, you allow your child to be vulnerable and imperfect too.

“This is necessary to build a foundation of trust and confidence in a learning environment, especially when discussing a topic that is new and personal.

“Something like, ‘That’s a really good question – I don’t know the answer to that right now but I will find out and let you know by tomorrow, is that OK?’ Make sure you do get back to them – if they know you will answer them, they’re more likely to ask more questions.”

Parents shouldn’t worry about not having specific training when discussing RSE topics – the first step is maintaining a relationship where their young people feel able to communicate with them.

Neil Kittle, sexual health promotion officer at HIV and sexual health charity Terrence Higgins Trust, added: “We know parents have a lot on their plates right now but being mindful about teaching their kids about LGBT+ relationships will go a long way to ensuring all young people get the knowledge they need for later life.

“The government has committed to ensuring all schools deliver LGBT-inclusive Relationships and Sex Education lessons but parents also have an important role to help normalise discussions about these topics.”

Kittle continued: “Parents shouldn’t worry about not having specific training when discussing RSE topics – the first step is maintaining a relationship where their young people feel able to communicate with them.

“There’s lots of resources out there to help support discussing relationships and sexual health. Parents shouldn’t feel afraid to help young people carry out their own appropriate research, for example how to access sexual health services and how to test for sexually transmitted infections. This all contributes to empowering young people to take better care of their sexual health and overall wellbeing.

“During this period of lockdown, young people may also be exposed to additional pressures such as sexting or being asked to share images. While these may not be issues parents have first-hand experience of, it’s really important young people feel supported and can talk about concerns they have.”

https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2021/01/13/lgbt-sex-relationships-education-rse-coronavirus-lockdown-home-school-ofsted/