



Gofal Cymdeithasol **Cymru**
Social Care **Wales**

Children's sexual health and education

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Go to <https://socialcare.wales/resources-guidance/improving-care-and-support/children-who-are-looked-after/childrens-sexual-health-and-education> for the latest version.

Find out how you can support the sexual health and education of the children you care for

Why is it important to think about sex and relationships for the young people you care for?

All young people need information and advice about sex and relationships. This includes information about physical development, sexuality, healthy relationships, as well as sexual health advice and contraception.

We know young people living in residential care can have gaps in their knowledge about sex and relationships and their emotional well-being can influence their attitudes and behaviour around this.

We also know the young people you care for are less likely to use contraception and more likely to experience early pregnancy than other children.

Gaps in knowledge about sex and relationships

Children living in residential child care are often given leaflets about sex and relationships. These aren't as practical or engaging as school lessons that include demonstrations of how to put on a condom, for instance. Such lessons can also spark children's curiosity and get them talking among themselves.

If one of your young people has missed out on sex and relationships lessons in school, leaflets may not inspire them to ask you further questions. There's then a danger they have gaps in their knowledge.

We also know children and young people increasingly get their sex education from the internet; often pornographic sites that don't reflect real life.

Make sure you feel comfortable talking about sex and relationships

Remember that staff are individuals, just like the children you care for. Make sure your manager and other staff members know your boundaries and comfort levels when talking about sex and relationships with your young people. If you feel uncomfortable talking about sex or body parts, it's better that other, more comfortable, staff have the conversation with the child.

You might be unclear about what advice to give and concerned about being seen to encourage or condone ['unhealthy' sexual activity](#). Professionals can also sometimes avoid addressing sex and relationship issues with young people as they assume that others are meeting these needs.

How can you best support young people about sex and relationships?

It's important you make sure the information you give is right for the child, delivered in the right way and the right time.

Be available

Let young people know they can approach you for information and advice. Encourage open, honest and frank discussion. Respond to young people without judgement, but with care and compassion. Let them know that discussions about sex and relationships are unlikely to be a 'one off' conversation and you are available as a source of on-going support and advice.

Be led by the young person

The type of support young people need will vary, as well as who they want this support to come from and how. Let them know that you can support them directly or can help them access support from others. It's important not to make assumptions about an [individual's sexuality](#) and / or the extent of their existing knowledge and experience.

Be prepared

You may need to support the young person to access more information and advice. Think about the range of professionals and organisations that could be helpful and be ready to discuss these options with the young person. These may include:

- the child's dedicated nurse for looked after children
- their GP
- locally available sexual health clinics
- LGBT+ organisations.

In addition, familiarise yourself with websites and helplines that are targeted at young people. We've listed useful resources at the bottom of the page.

Be informed

Confidentiality, and the limits to this, is likely to be a key concern for young people. Familiarise yourself with the law around consent, as well as policies and procedures connected to sex and relationships. These may be your organisation's policies, as well as national protocols for responding to concerns about [sexual abuse and exploitation](#). Being clear about your professional responsibilities around safeguarding will enable you to make these responsibilities clear to young people.

[Consent – it's as simple as tea](#)

[The Childline Youtube channel has videos covering a wide range of sex and relationship issues](#)

Ask your team for training about sex and relationship issues if you think this would be helpful.

Be open to on-going developments in practice

Young people are valuable sources of information and are best placed to advise you about how you can better offer support about sex and relationships. Encourage them to be

involved in developing or reviewing good practice guidance.

Use the biological names for body parts

You should use the correct biological names for body parts when you're talking to the children and young people you care for (rather than repeat the slang terms the young people may use themselves). This is crucial because if organisations like the Police need to speak to your young people, for instance about a safeguarding issue, the child needs to refer to the correct biological names for body parts. That way there is no misunderstanding about what they're talking about.

Useful resources

[Our work to support children who are looked after](#)

[Our chosen or 'curated' research about the number who are looked after](#)

[Think you know](#)

[Meic: Information, advice and advocacy helpline for children and young people](#)

Information about sexual health

[Brook: sexual health and well-being for under 25s](#)

[The Family Planning Association \(FPA\)](#)

[The Mix: essential support for under 25s](#)

Advice for young people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersex or asexual (LGBT+). See also our page about [Children's identity](#).

[Switchboard LGBT+ helpline](#)

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Residential child care worker resource by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).