

# Image in Action



## Talk About It

### Sex & Relationships Education

### Young People with Learning Disabilities or Additional Learning Needs

### Working 1-1 with individuals

*'Ben missed so much PSHE last year, he's confused with the changes happening to his body and how to cope with the range of relationships and feelings with his peer group'*

*'Aisha just isn't coping well with her periods; wish we could help her a bit more in school'*

*'Cherise is a real worry to us, she has such low self-esteem, especially after the sexting incident'*



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# Talk About It

## Sex & Relationships Education with Young People with Learning Disabilities or Additional Learning Needs



By Image in Action



# Talk About It

## Sex & Relationships Education (SRE) with Young People with Learning Disabilities or Additional Learning Needs

### How staff can work with individuals on 1-1 SRE programmes

#### *Introducing Personalised SRE Learning*

Image in Action has 29 years' experience of Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) with young people with learning disabilities and additional learning needs, primarily through group work.

In recent years we have recognised the need for a more personalised approach for some young people, they need some short term individualised work to address specific learning needs and to support them to transfer their classroom learning to their lives.

Over recent years we have delivered many one to one sessions for young people with a wide range of abilities and needs using our experiences to guide the development of a new model of personalised SRE.

Many organisations want to address the immediate needs some young disabled people have in the area of Sex and Relationships but feel hesitant and lack guidelines or the time to develop a model themselves. The nature of the topics and the one to one setting mean a robust and transparent framework is required, additionally good planning and clear boundaries are needed from all involved.

#### *How will this document help?*

In response to this need we have begun to draw together some ideas on how special and mainstream schools, FE colleges and others can safely deliver this type of work themselves.

This document does not represent a blueprint for organisations wishing to set up a service but could support and contribute to what can be a challenging process.

We present a preliminary checklist of some of the key issues and some pointers to good practice derived from our learning in delivering successful one to one SRE sessions.

#### *Further Support*

Organisations wanting support to take forward the development of personalised SRE or wanting to commission direct work with individuals can contact Image in Action to discuss requirements.



## ***Who needs the work?***

There are many factors that can leave a young person vulnerable and in need of some additional input around SRE issues. A young person may

- Need help to follow and keep up with mainstream SRE session
- Need support to transfer SRE learning to their personal circumstances
- Need some targeted education to address a current issue related to sex or relationships
- Need to top up SRE to meet learning needs not addressed through PSHE provision

Most of our one to one work has taken place in mainstream and special schools and colleges but we have also worked in other settings such as youth work and day services. Work can be of particular use when a young person's needs are out of kilter with others in their peer group due to their differing rates of maturity or for those needing a different pace of work or additional processing time for information to be assimilated.

Some young people experience complex psychological issues connected to sex and relationships, there may be a crisis or challenging family circumstances. The model we describe here of individual education sessions is not the appropriate support for these young people. In such cases specialist services and possibly therapeutic support needs to be sought.

## ***What is the work like?***

A young person meets a member of staff for a structured, well planned series of sessions. The focus is on education but allowing for personalisation of the learning. Work is short term, focused and carefully monitored. The work requires consistent staffing and a private room within the school or organisation. Care must be taken not to stray into a counselling or therapy role.

A priority is for the work to be safe for pupils and staff. In writing about group work we have described the conditions necessary for safe and effective work and many of the requirements are similar to those needed for one to one work.

## ***Boundaries: Personalised but Distanced***

In Image in Action group work we make extensive use of characters, storytelling and role play which all assist to distance the work from the individuals involved and minimise inappropriate personal disclosure. All three techniques can be used in one to one work successfully and followed up with more personal discussion. These techniques help to ensure work is safe and appropriate.

For a detailed explanation of distancing work, techniques and examples of characters see 'Going Further' (resource available free from [www.imageinaction.org](http://www.imageinaction.org)). It can be useful to explain how and why these methods are being used. Some young people will be able to grasp their usefulness in lessening embarrassment, others will need to be shown in practise and repeatedly reminded about their use. It is helpful if similar methods are used in SRE group discussions too as then young people will be familiar with the approaches.



## Resources

Image in Action has produced key resources to support SRE group work and many of the activities work well with individuals with just minor adjustments, 'The Confidence Factor', 'Going Further', 'Let's Do It' and 'Let's Plan It' all contain activities which may be used in one to one work.

The Family Planning Association ( fpa) has a series of books called 'Talking Together' which are designed for staff or parents wanting to discuss SRE issues with young people with learning disabilities and these are an excellent starting place for planning direct work with individuals. These resources cover a wide range of topics and are aimed at different age groups and ability levels.

There are also other organisations which have produced useful resources - see the Resources section of this document on page 14 for further details.

## Policy and Procedure

There will be issues to discuss in order to ensure that any work is conducted in a way that ensures the safety of the individual pupil, the staff involved and the organisation as a whole.

- How does the organisation's Safeguarding policy relate to one to one SRE work?
- Does the SRE policy need revising in order to adequately cover individual SRE sessions?
- Are staff familiar with the Disclosure policy and procedure and how are pupils informed of it?
- How can individual confidentiality be respected within the policy and procedural framework?
- Does the organisation need a separate procedure for staff delivering one to one SRE detailing requirements for safe practice?
- 'Getting Started' is free on the Resources page of [www.imageinaction.org](http://www.imageinaction.org) and helps staff to think about the issues of setting up work.
- Guidance on SRE policy from [www.sef.org.uk](http://www.sef.org.uk)

## Deciding if work is appropriate

Any consideration of individual work needs to look at what education need is apparent and consider its suitability for schools based work. There will be pupils with complex psychological needs, a crisis or a safeguarding concern connected to SRE knowledge or behaviour, however, these types of issues would not be suitable areas of work for school staff to undertake. These pupils will often require specialist or therapeutic input.

Organisations need to use caution and ensure that pupils, staff and the organisation are within a safe framework and working on appropriate materials that follow the school's curriculum and do not stray into therapeutic or specialist areas of work.

***We strongly advocate caution in tackling complex sex and relationship issues; they are beyond the scope of this brief document and require a robust process and considerable specialist skills.***



Sometimes a seemingly straightforward piece of SRE work can become complex and need a different type of approach. Staff need to be clear about what issues are within their brief and be confident to refer on and stop sessions in order to keep themselves and the pupil safe. Good policy, supervision and due regard to safety will help ensure that staff are equipped to deal with comments made personally by the pupil and know how, when and where to seek additional support.

### ***Staffing and Supervision***

- Which staff have the skills and confidence to deliver SRE?
- Who will set up and manage the 1-1 work and be accountable to senior management?
- Who is best placed to provide skilful supervision to staff leading direct work?
- How will consistency of staffing be achieved?

### ***Planning, Recording and Monitoring***

- Is there a format for planning sessions? (see page 15 for suggested session sheet)
- What information needs to be recorded, where will it be kept and with whom will it be shared?
- What resources are available to support session planning and delivery?

Staff unfamiliar with writing learning objectives or planning might need a checklist such as the one below to help with structuring their thoughts when writing a session plan.

- What do I hope the pupil will have learned or be able to do by the end of this session?
- What resources might be useful?
- What topics or issues do I anticipate being raised?
- Have I planned a variety of activities that will be fun and directly involve the pupil?
- Do I need to assess their comprehension or knowledge either at the start or end of the session, how can I do this?

Staff need to record what happens in sessions, ideally this needs to be done immediately following a session, it need not be detailed but does need to include any issues, actions, new needs, evidence of learning and ideas for future sessions. Brief notes written on the session plan sheet are sufficient. Assessment and evaluation formats can be found in Let's Plan It and The Confidence Factor.

### ***Practical issues***

- Is there a suitable private room for sessions?
- When can staff and pupils be available for regular session slots?
- Do staff have sufficient planning time and an opportunity to write up notes immediately following a session?



## ***A first session***

- A first session is a time to set the boundaries of the work with a pupil, for example, by drawing up a contract of how staff and pupil will work together, this would encompass a discussion about confidentiality and disclosure.
- It's a time to set the agenda and agree topics that will be covered, including the pupil's suggestions.
- The pupil needs to know why work has been planned, when, where and how often sessions will happen.
- Additionally it may be used to introduce the methods of working and have some fun. These features should all assist in setting the pupil at ease.

## ***Session Structure***

As with Image in Action's group work it seems that sessions work best when carefully structured, it adds to a sense of safety and containment of the issues. A session might follow a pattern of:-

- Welcoming and settling
- Putting up a private sign to ensure no interruptions
- A 'check in' allowing time for a brief exchange about current issues or feelings and a reminder of the ground rules of the session
- A recap of the last session's work
- A number of varied, structured activities that explore the main themes of the session, these could include matching or ordering photos, role play, storytelling about a character, presenting information or using a worksheet as a basis for further discussion
- Summary and recap of the main points, there might also be homework in the form of things to think about or skills to practise before the next session
- Feedback from the staff on the pupils' participation and learning
- Opportunity for evaluation of the activities or session as a whole from the pupil
- Reminder of next session's details and closure of the session

## ***Topics and Themes***

- Each individual has his or her own unique issues and that requires staff to work creatively with resources to plan a series of sessions.
- Often the work will arise out of PSHE sessions and involve recapping, personalising and extending the work from lessons.
- Sometimes work needs more planning and thought to draw together the themes, this might be done through referring to the school SRE curriculum or scheme of work.
- Additionally, in the Image in Action resource 'Let's Plan It' the section on curriculum maps may help to identify themes and show how they link together





## Case studies

The case studies below illustrate some of the varied issues that require one to one intervention and show how themes might emerge to form the basic plan for session content.

### Shania



*Shania is a 12 year old girl on the autistic spectrum; she attends a specialist school for pupils with Autism Spectrum Conditions and is the only girl in her class. She has attended the general PSHE lessons with her peers but she now needs an opportunity to learn how puberty and menstruation affect her personally.*

Themes for work with Shania might include

- puberty for girls,
- details of body changes and practical information about periods,
- personal hygiene,
- exploration of how she feels about becoming a young woman,
- changes to social expectations and appropriate behaviour as she grows up.

Other topics may have been covered in class but need further exploration as she is in an all male class with some boys with very complex needs and poor awareness of boundaries e.g.

Assertion and self-esteem, safety, consent and appropriate touching.

Many of these themes could be addressed by using 'Talking Together about Growing Up' (fpa).

There are activities suitable for children with severe learning disabilities and ASC.

Staff could develop a series of sessions designed for Shania from this resource and possibly send copies of the work done home to her parents so they can reinforce the learning.



## Henry

*Henry is 16 and has a physical disability, he missed lots of schooling and although he is doing well there were concerns that he was not as streetwise as his peers and therefore was vulnerable and needed some support to help him learn how to keep safe.*



Themes for work with Henry might include

- personal safety,
- awareness of risk,
- assertion,
- self-esteem,
- consent
- accessing local sexual health services and youth groups.

Henry might add in his need to talk about over protective parents, peer pressure and talking to girls.

Staff planning a series of sessions for Henry could use 'Going Further', a free resource from Image in Action

Many of the activities for groups would work well with an individual and there are characters that could be used to develop storytelling and distanced work with Henry about the issues he faces as a young man, including E safety.



## Omady



*Omady, a 14 year old girl who has recently arrived in Britain, she has been identified as having some additional learning needs, she attended an SRE group but found it hard to keep up, she struggled to relate the learning in the group to her own situation and she had lots of questions about her personal issues that were not appropriate to a group setting.*

Themes for work with Omady might include

- recapping the contents of SRE sessions
- checking understanding with specific attention to puberty,
- making friends,
- appropriate behaviour
- personal safety.

Omady might have lots of questions which can be addressed in the one to one setting.

Much of the work with Omady might be built around recapping her SRE lessons.

‘The Confidence Factor’ can be used to help Omady learn social skills and the importance of consent

‘Talking Together about Growing Up’ and ‘Talking Together about Sex and Relationships’ (FPA) include visual resources that will help Omady make sense of some of the more challenging issues she is struggling to understand.



## Joshua

*Joshua is 15; he has an autism spectrum condition and is doing very well academically. He is rather isolated at school but would not fit in with the social skills group facilitated by the SEN and mentoring department for pupils with learning disabilities. He needs some specific help with understanding about sexual feelings, the nature of attraction and the difference between friendships and intimate relationships*



Themes for work with Joshua might include

- how to make and build friendships,
- personal space,
- trust,
- assertion
- puberty and sexual feelings
- different types of relationships.

Joshua might have specific issues he can bring to sessions and might be able to complete worksheets and tasks on these topics between sessions.

Using a resource such as 'The Confidence Factor' would give a useful structure for work. There are worksheets he could complete and the materials are specifically written for pupils with autism spectrum conditions

'Talking Together about sex and relationships' would be useful to develop his understanding about a range of relationships



## ***Endings and Evaluation***

How a piece of work ends is important. Staff need to be clear about the number of sessions and flag up when the series of sessions is drawing to a close.

There needs to be a summing up and reflecting on the learning and process of the work plus some direction on where and how a pupil can receive more help if or when needed.

Staff and pupil need to be involved in evaluating the work. This need not be complex but just a way of recording the outcomes of the work, the learning for the staff and the organisation and if possible allowing others to contribute their observations on the successes or otherwise of the intervention.

## ***A way forward?***

We hope that this document can provoke thoughts and inspire staff to consider individual SRE work. The affect of even small interventions on such crucial and sensitive topics can be immensely helpful for young disabled people as they move towards safe and fulfilling personal development.

**Image in Action** provides

- direct work with people with learning disabilities or additional learning needs
  - SRE group work or individual programmes
  - staff training in methods and approaches
- support for organisations to develop and review policy



Please have a look at our website: [www.imageinaction.org](http://www.imageinaction.org)

email: [info@imageinaction.org](mailto:info@imageinaction.org)

phone: 01494 481632



# Resources

## From Image in Action

*Let's Do It; creative activities for sex and relationship education for young people with learning disabilities*

Rebecca Johns, Lorna Scott and Janet Bliss

*Let's Plan It; a planning guide for sex and relationships education for young people and adults with learning disabilities* Lorna Scott and Sarah Duignan

*The Confidence Factor* SRE for young people with ASC and/or moderate learning disabilities

Sarah Duignan and Lesley Kerr-Edwards

Published by Image in Action [www.imageinaction.org](http://www.imageinaction.org) 01494 481 632

*Going Further; Sex and Relationships Education for students with learning disabilities at FE Colleges* by Lesley Kerr-Edwards, funded by the Department of Health and free to download from the Image in Action website

## From FPA

*Talking Together about growing up*

*Talking Together about sex and relationships*

*Talking Together about contraception*

Three books by Lesley Kerr-Edwards and Lorna Scott, Image in Action Published by fpa [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)  
020 7608 5240

## Other resources

There are organisations that publish resources for Sex and Relationship Education that include useful items for those working with people with learning disabilities. The websites below will give details about what is available from the organisations and how to order from them.

[www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk) e.g. All about us , Sex and the Law

[www.brook.org.uk](http://www.brook.org.uk) e.g. Living your life

[www.bodysense.org.uk](http://www.bodysense.org.uk) e.g. Periods, a practical guide, Picture Yourself, Anatomically correct models

[www.changepeople.co.uk](http://www.changepeople.co.uk) e.g. SRE pictures, LGBT info

[www.lifesupportproductions.co.uk](http://www.lifesupportproductions.co.uk) e.g. a DVD called You, your body and sex

[www.bild.org.uk](http://www.bild.org.uk) e.g. Exploring social and sexual understanding

[www.pavpub.com](http://www.pavpub.com) e.g. Becoming a woman

[www.jkp.com](http://www.jkp.com) e.g. many books about ASC and sexuality



Staff leading session

Pupils name

Location

Date

Length of session

Topics to be addressed/ Learning objectives

Resources/activities prepared

Resources used

Session plan/activity details

Outcomes/Issues arising

Actions (including safeguarding, sharing information, strategies and wider issues)

Future learning needs/plans for next session

Supervised by

