Relationships and sexual health
Best practice guidelines

For those working with children and young people in Cornwall in social care, youth, health and education
Avel synyas portfolio rag flehes, pes da ov vy komendya dhywgh “Gidlinennow dhe’ñ Gwella Praktis rag Perthynyansow ha Yehes Reydhel”.

Displegya an kyfyans, aswonvos ha sleyneth rag bos da gans perthynyansow posedhek ha yehes reydhel yw a res rag an dispelyans yagh a flehes ha tus yowynk hag y koodh formya rann an argerdh-dyski a bub flogh dres oll y vewnans.

A res yw yehes reydhel posedhek rag dispelyans flehes ha tus yowynk a honanieth, omvri hag ombris positiv ha diogel hag y provi an menow drehevyansel rag aga gweres owth omdhisplegya yn tus yowynk ha wor’tiwedd tevesigyon lowen, yagh hag omgemyansel.

Displegys re beu an gidyans ma rag gweres dhe prakitsyoryon oll orth skoodhya flehes ha tus yowynk dres pub kamm a’ga dispelyans hag y hwovyn orth prakitsyoryon oll a worra perthynyansow ha yehes reydhel a-bervedh yn ober po arvreusyans sewena pynag omgemyans gans flehes ha tus yowynk.

Yn arbennek my a garsa golowboyntyda dhywgh An Toul Golowys Traffik Brook; asnodhow a vri ow skoodhya prakitsyoryon orth aswon fara hag a dhelin dispelyans reydhel yagh dhyworth fara hag a alsa bos dregynnus. Dre gowlwul an toul ma a-dreus Kernow, govenek a’m beus bos prakitsyoryon skoodhys dhe wul arvreusyansow diduel ha kyfyansek hag a surha yn sewyans gorthyp uhel y nas ha kesson dhe’ñ edhommmow yehes reydhel a flehes ha tus yowynk. Ober keskowethyansel yw krevder gwir yn Kernow ha nyns yw mmam an ober kowlwrys a-dro dhe berthynyansow ha yehes reydhel. Ynia a wrab pub kowethyans ha dhodho tus yowynk y fog dhe redya an gidyans ma gans rach ha my a grys ev dhe brovia skoodhys meur dhywgh hwi oll ow pesya ha drehevel war an ober brav hag a hwer a-dreus an vro vras ha treweythyow gorholus ma. Sewya an mayn unys ha framyes ma a brovi gwella prakits y’n arenebedh a yehes reydhel ha perthynyansow na wra saw agan gweres orth skoodhya pella an sewena a’n flehes ha tus yowynk hag a hwilyn ni aga skoodhya.

Andrew Wallis KK
Kesordenor Omdhon ha Yehes Reydhel Degowek
Yehes Poblek
Gwith, Yehes ha Sewena Tevesigyon
Konsel Kernow
Foreword

As the portfolio holder for children I have great pleasure in presenting the “Relationships and Sexual Health Best Practice Guidelines” to you.

Developing the confidence, knowledge and skills to enjoy positive relationships and sexual health is vital to children and young people’s healthy development and should form part of every child’s life long learning process.

Positive sexual health is integral to children and young people’s development of a positive and secure identity, self-worth and self esteem and provides the building blocks to help them develop into happy, healthy, responsible young people and eventually adults.

This guidance has been developed to aid all practitioners in supporting children and young people throughout their development and asks that all practitioners embed relationships and sexual health into any wellbeing work or assessment undertaken with children and young people.

In particular I would like to highlight to you The Brook Traffic Light Tool; an invaluable resource in supporting practitioners to identify behaviours that represent healthy sexual development from potentially harmful behaviours. By implementing this tool across Cornwall I hope that practitioners are supported to make confident, objective assessments, which in turn ensures a high quality and consistent response to all children and young people’s sexual health needs.

Partnership work is a real strength in Cornwall and the work carried out around relationships and sexual health is no exception. I urge all young people focused organisations to read this guidance with care and believe that it will provide great support to you all in continuing and building upon the excellent work that goes on across this large and sometimes challenging county. Following this cohesive and structured approach to providing best practice in the area of sexual health and relationships work will only help us further support the wellbeing of the children and young people we seek to support.

Andrew Wallis CC
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Section 1
Cornwall’s approach to sexual health

Introduction

Developing the skills to identify, form and maintain positive and safe relationships now, and as an adult, is vital to all children and young people’s current and future wellbeing.

An understanding of their own bodies, sexual behaviour and sexuality is key to forming a positive sense of self and should be supported alongside the opportunity to develop skills to understand and make positive choices about the physical and emotional relationships they enter, their own actions and behaviour and the ways in which they keep themselves safe and healthy.

Practitioners working with children and young people also need to understand that sexual health and healthy relationships begins at a young age, is wide ranging and consists of many different factors:

- Dignity and respect for self and others.
- Promoting positive self-esteem, self-worth and self-image.
- Setting appropriate boundaries.
- Understanding and feeling comfortable with your body and sexuality as it develops.
- Access to health services, support, advice and guidance.
- Acting according to your own personal values.
- Forming and maintaining healthy relationships.
- Protection from unplanned pregnancy and STIs.
- Understanding consent; your own and others.
- Recognising risks, including coercion, abuse and exploitation.
- Understanding the risks and responsibilities of your own behaviour.
- Gender identity, influences and challenging negative stereotypes.

Sexual health is a state of physical, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

World Health Organisation definition of sexual health
Scope

This guidance has been written for people working with children and young people in Cornwall. It is relevant for all working in health, social care, youth, education and any other agency with direct contact with children and young people.

In this guidance the term practitioner means anybody working alongside children and young people, including but not limited to: social workers, family support workers, residential workers. Foster carers, youth workers, health professionals, educationalists, volunteers and voluntary sector workers.

This guidance was developed by a multi agency working group with representation across social care, youth, health, education and the voluntary sector. It was then distributed for wider consultation before being endorsed by Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Safeguarding Children’s Board on the 30th October 2013 and approved by Cornwall Children’s Trust in February 2014.

This document is best practice aspirational guidance and should be considered alongside LSCB safeguarding procedures and your agency’s individual policies and protocols.

This will include, but is not limited to:

- South West Safeguarding and Child Protection Procedures
- Cornwall Children’s Services Procedures Manual
- Cornwall Children’s Homes Procedures Manual
- South West Safeguarding Guidance on Sexually Active Young People
- Child Sexual Exploitation procedures
- Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence procedures
- Reducing Teenage Conceptions and Support for Young Parents Strategy

Sexual Orientation

We have purposefully not included a section around sexual orientation, as we have embedded values around dignity and respect for others, understanding feelings and sexuality, equal access to services and valuing relationships regardless of gender throughout the document. Cornwall has an LGBTQ Youth group which provides a space for young people to meet others in a safe, supportive environment: http://www.lgbtqyouthcornwall.co.uk
Aims

This document aims to provide guidance to practitioners, including carers, to enable them to promote positive relationships, understanding of physical and emotional development and promote positive sexual health amongst the children and young people they work alongside.

It also aims to support practitioners to distinguish healthy sexual development from potentially harmful behaviour and to enable practitioners to effectively identify, assess and appropriately respond to risk.

Objectives

- To outline the roles and responsibilities of practitioners working with children and young people.
- To clarify the important role all practitioners have in promoting the sexual health and wellbeing of children and young people who are looked after.
- To ensure that practitioners are clear and confident about delivering relationship and sexual health information, to young people.
- To ensure that practitioners are clear and confident about the role of specialist services in relation to sexual health, including, how and when to signpost and support young people to access these services.
- To provide practitioners with a consistent guiding message about relationships and sexual health.
- To ensure practitioners are supported with access to appropriate information, training and resources including onward sign-posting.
- To ensure that practitioners are aware of legal requirements and obligations when working with young people.
- To support practitioners’ assessment of sexual behaviour and to share a coordinated approach to assessing and responding to sexual health need and risk.

Notes on Using this Guidance

This guidance has been designed to be used electronically and wherever possible has provided links to resources and further information to enable users to access timely information.
Guiding Principles

Our approach to meeting the relationship and sexual health needs of children and young people in Cornwall is guided by these principles.

- The primary duty of all practitioners is to promote and ensure the welfare and safety of the children and young people they have contact with or are responsible for.
- All young people have the right to receive good relationships and sex education (RSE). Formal and informal RSE helps young people to develop the knowledge and skills they need to enter into healthy, non-abusive personal relationships and make positive choices that protect them from unintended pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infections.
- Young people have a right to access services. Encouraging use of sexual health services will help protect their health and can also help address issues of self-esteem, negotiation skills, deferring sex and risk.
- Sexual health and sexual development should be considered as part of a young person's health and wellbeing. It should not be viewed in isolation but form part of ongoing holistic assessment alongside other, interrelated factors.
- Sexual health is a very important part of how we feel about ourselves and others. Helping children and young people develop and enjoy good sexual health goes hand in hand with helping them feel good about themselves in general and their place in the world; valuing and having respect for themselves and other people.
- This guidance does not condone any breaches of the law. However children and young people are entitled to confidentiality, experimentation and developing their sexuality unless their behaviour puts them or someone else at risk. Developing sexuality, including experimentation, is part of the journey to adulthood, it is our job to support, protect and equip young people with the skills required to make that journey safely.
- Children and young people's experiences can leave them vulnerable and in need of additional support, guidance and safeguarding. Such experiences may include missing out on education, lack of guidance, or abuse or neglect which may impact on their understanding of what a healthy relationship means.
- All children and young people have equal rights and should have equal access to services and support, dependent on their need, regardless of age¹, care status, disability, HIV status, gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, family situation, beliefs, religion or economic and social standing.
- Young people will be supported as they explore their sexual orientation and develop their own sexual identity. Young people have the right to engage in same sex relationships, and for these relationships to be valued and accepted in the same way as heterosexual relationships².
- We all have a responsibility to appropriately challenge issues of discrimination and prejudice. To not do so runs the risk of colluding with these views.

¹ However it is important to note that age of the young person would impact on a service's assessment of risk.
² The Equality Act 2010 outlaws discrimination in the provision of goods, facilities and services, education and public functions on the grounds of sexual orientation.
Roles and Responsibilities

If you are someone working alongside children and young people you are in the privileged position to proactively offer support and guidance on growing up, relationships and sexual health. It is also highly likely that you are going to need to respond appropriately and quickly to emerging needs and questions children and young people may have about a range of issues.

Whilst your specific responsibilities may vary depending upon your role, it is important to remember that young people will want to talk about relationships, sex and sexual health with an adult they feel they trust; it is important that whatever your role, you are able to support a young person and respond appropriately if the person they choose to discuss or raise anything with is you.

You also have a responsibility to proactively support children and young people’s sexual and relationship development through appropriate assessment of need, support and education. Sexual health and healthy relationships should be part of open communication with children and young people regardless of your role.

Sexual health, in particular contraception and STIs, can be a fast moving science. Likewise relationships and sexual health can be areas of extreme complexity for a child or young person and may require a specialist intervention. It is not the expectation that every practitioner will be an expert. However all practitioners should have a good understanding of general sexual health needs, risk and how to access more information or support.

All practitioners working alongside children and young people’s role and responsibilities should:

1. Promote consistent positive messages around healthy relationships and sexual health in line with your safeguarding duties.
2. Respond appropriately to needs and risk.
3. Know how and when to access specialist services.

All practitioners have a responsibility to work within the law and in line with their safeguarding duties. A summary of the legal framework is provided in this guidance. For further information visit www.legislation.gov.uk and review the Working Together to Safeguard Children Statutory Guidance.

The Sexual Health Training Team offer a programme of opportunities to support your development of the above knowledge and skills. For details of training currently available email teenagepregnancy@cornwall.gov.uk.

There are also a number of resources and links identified in this guidance which you should routinely use as both a reference point and to update your knowledge.
1. Promoting consistent positive messages around healthy relationships and sexual health includes:

- Having enough knowledge and understanding to be able to hold informal, opportunistic and planned conversations with children and young people. You should be able to deliver clear messages around healthy relationships, choice, staying safe, aspirations, self-worth, risk, sexual health and consent.

- Promoting choice and high aspirations, in relationships and as a key life skill.

- Promoting positive sexual health as part of their wider health and wellbeing, including contraceptive use if they are, or are thinking about becoming, sexually active.

- Supporting young people in developing negotiation and assertiveness skills so that they are equipped to respond to pressure to have early unwanted sex and have the freedom and capacity to make informed consent.

- Supporting a young person to obtain information, advice and guidance, including signposting and supporting them to access services, accompanying them if appropriate.

- Supporting children and young people to understand and feel comfortable and confident with their bodies.

- Being aware that effective work on relationships and sexual health can be part of a planned piece of work in a one to one or group setting as well as reactive and opportunistic (for example responding to a young person approaching you for information or support or as a result of emerging needs/risks)

- Being open and accessible, listening and not judging, being sensitive to any issues and how a young person is feeling.

- Supporting parents and carers to understand their important role in children and young people’s development. This includes:
  - Where appropriate support children and young people to be able to discuss relationships and sexual health with their carers.
  - Where appropriate support and encourage parents and carers to become a positive source of relationship and sex information, advice and guidance for the children in their care.
2. Respond appropriately and knowledgably to emerging needs in line with your safeguarding duties. This includes:

- Including relationships, sexual health and sexual development as part of any holistic assessment of a child or young person’s wellbeing.
- Identify, assess and manage risk in line with your safeguarding duties. When concern or risk is identified, following safeguarding procedures and ensuring a referral is made to the Multi Agency Referral Unit (MARU (0300 123116)).
- Using the Brook Traffic Light Tool to inform any assessment of sexual behaviours.
- Using the CSE risk assessment tool when a young person has been identified as at risk of child sexual exploitation.
- Identify and risk assess a young person’s relationship that is disclosed as, or a practitioner has concerns may be, abusive and make an appropriate referral to specialist domestic abuse services through the REACH service (Risk Evaluation and Co-ordination Hub) telephone 0300 777 4777.
- Putting in place support and strategies to minimise risk, including, when a young person is sexually active or taking sexual risks, facilitating access to sexual health services for advice, and contraceptive support. This applies even if the young person is under 16.
- Having the appropriate level of knowledge to be able to support health protection alongside risk assessment. For example responding to a disclosure of unprotected sex by supporting the young person to access sexual health services, including emergency contraception.
- Understand the potential impact experiences may have on a child or young person. For example the experience of abuse may lead to a distorted understanding of relationships and that child or young person may need extra support.

3. Know how and when to access specialist services this includes:

- Be aware of the different relevant services in Cornwall, their remit, how to access these services and when there is a need to. (see Services)
- Following appropriate pathways, protocols and referral procedures.
- Provide young people with appropriate support to access the services they need.