

# Permission to Discuss

## Talking to children and young people about healthy relationships and sex

### A Guide for Parents and Carers



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## Context and vision:

As a family of schools within The Diocese of Guildford, we believe every pupil has the right to a broad and rich education to be offered within a distinctly Christian context, valuing each child as an individual and enabling them to flourish by discovering and developing their God given gifts. A fundamental aspect of the quality of education our schools provide, is teaching our children and young people how to stay safe and healthy, including understanding and valuing identity, respect, and difference. In our schools this is carried out within a distinctively Christian ethos, underpinned by the Church of England's [Vision for Education](#) and the following guiding principles:

### **Educating for wisdom, knowledge and skills:**

enabling discipline, confidence and delight in seeking wisdom and knowledge, and developing talents in all areas of life.

**Educating for hope and aspiration:** enabling healing, repair and renewal, coping wisely when things go wrong, opening horizons and guiding people into ways of fulfilling them.

### **Educating for community and living well together:**

a core focus on relationships, participation in communities and the qualities of character that enable people to flourish together.

**Educating for dignity and respect:** the basic principle of respect for the value and preciousness of each person, treating each person as a unique individual of inherent worth.



Our schools are also accountable to national guidance and statutory duties, and this year (2020-21) all

schools will start to deliver a Relationships, and Health Education curriculum, (and Sex Education in Secondary Schools) (RHSE) in line with [statutory guidance](#). Primary schools can also opt to deliver age-appropriate Sex and Relationships Education programmes in upper Key Stage 2, both as part of the Science curriculum, and as part of the Personal, Social, and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum.



In order to ensure the

curriculum in each school meets the needs of its local

community and context, all schools will have consulted with parents and other stakeholders, as part of their activities in preparing to launch their curriculum this year. Many parents will have taken part in these consultation activities in recent months.

This booklet is a Diocese of Guildford Education Department document particularly to support parents of children in primary schools. When your child reaches secondary school, the school will have more resources available for you.

## What is Relationships, Health and Sex Education (often called RHSE)?

### Why is it important?

RHSE is age-appropriate learning about physical, sexual, moral and emotional development. It is about the understanding of the importance of marriage for family life, stable and loving relationships, respect, love, and care. It is also about the teaching of sex, sexuality, and sexual health at the best age and developmental stage for children and young people. It is not about the promotion of sexual orientation or sexual activity.



and keep ourselves safe.

- personal and social skills
  - learning to manage emotions and relationships confidently and sensitively.
  - developing self-respect and empathy for others.
  - learning to make choices based on an understanding and respect for difference and without prejudice - developing an appreciation of the consequences of choices made.
  - managing conflict.
  - learning how to recognise and avoid exploitation and abuse.

### **RHSE has three main elements:**

- attitudes and values
  - learning the importance of values and individual moral reflections and understanding.
  - learning the value of family life, marriage, and stable and loving relationships for the nurture of children.
  - learning the value of respect, love and care.
  - exploring and understanding moral dilemmas and difficult questions.
  - developing the skills and confidence to consider all options and consequences as part of decision-making, particularly when learning to lead healthy lifestyles,
- knowledge and understanding
  - learning and understanding physical development at appropriate stages.
  - understanding human sexuality, reproduction, sexual health, emotions, and relationships.
  - learning about contraception and the range of local and national sexual health advice, contraception, and support services.
  - learning the reasons for delaying sexual activity, and the benefits to be gained from such delay.
  - the avoidance of unplanned pregnancy.

## Why might parents and carers need this guidance?

“The role of parents in the development of their children’s understanding about relationships is vital. Parents are the first teachers of their children. They have the most significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.” RHSE Statutory Guidance, Department for Education, (updated July 2020)

Schools will have detailed curriculum plans on their websites for parents to see which aspects of PSHE and RHSE are planned to be taught, and many parents will have taken part in consultation activities to ensure the themes and learning expectations are appropriate for the ages, needs and context of the pupils.

With the impact of the COVID19 pandemic, individual pupils self-isolating whilst awaiting test results, or the recovery of family members, and the continuing potential for class bubbles, or whole schools to experience further closures, some of the PSHE and RHSE curriculum might be missed. This guide is therefore to support parents in delivering those learning activities that are scheduled for remote home learning, and to answer tricky questions from children.

The guide will also be valuable at any time, when children may have learned an RHSE topic in school, and naturally want to explore their understanding of their new learning at home, within their own family.

It is useful to have a confident knowledge and accurate understanding of these topics yourself before approaching them with your children. There is a range of helpful resources highlighted throughout this guide.



We recommend parents also read the Church of England’s guidance document [‘Valuing all God’s Children’](#) which sets out clear expectations for challenging, and protecting children and young people from, homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying in Church schools and communities. In his introduction, The Most Revd and Rt Hon Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury confirms that ‘Every one of us is loved unconditionally by God. We must avoid, at all costs, diminishing the dignity of any individual to a stereotype or a problem.’

## How do I start a conversation with children on healthy relationships and sex?

For some families, discussions on relationships and sex may feel like fairly new territory. For many families, there's nothing comfortable about talking to your children about sex, love and relationships. This might be particularly true when recognising and respecting different family forms and relationships that don't reflect our own lives. Equally, it's uncomfortable to leave children unprepared for the real world.



Clinical psychologist Dr Abigail San says parents just have to push this feeling of awkwardness to one side,

and that as the grown-ups, the parents, we should 'tolerate the awkwardness', as this will give your children the clear message that you're there for them to speak about the issues around sex and consent.

While families might place great importance on the protection of children's innocence, it is also important that children grow up prepared for the world and society around them. If they have enough information, they can build resilience, make wise choices when they feel under peer pressure, and so keep themselves healthy and safe. It can give them the confidence to speak up when uncomfortable in a relationship, or in difficulty.

A peek into a world not yet experienced can reassure children that their own feelings,

questions, and curiosities are valid, rather than isolated and 'different'.

It's also worth remembering, even if as parents and carers you do talk openly about healthy relationships and sex education with your own children, they will have friends and peers whose parents / carers are not so open, or who have different views. It is therefore important to have access to a wide range of age-appropriate resources that complement the school curriculum, to ensure all children have access to, and can discuss a wide range of high-quality information. This will ensure your children are confident to bring new information and questions back to their family to discuss different views and practices within your own family values.

Teachers in school will be encouraging children to talk to their families and trusted grownups about RHSE topics, and so children will want to hear and value your views from your family, cultural and faith perspective.

The 'Big Talk' is a thing of the past. Learning about healthy relationships and sex should not occur on one, often awkward, conversation. It should be more of an ongoing 'unfolding' process. One in which children learn, over time, what they need to know to satisfy their natural curiosity, and to keep them safe.

If your child doesn't ask questions, try not to ignore the subject. When your child is about five, parents and carers can begin to introduce books and other resources that explain bodies, relationships and sex in an age-appropriate way.

### **What is 'age-appropriate'?**

Whilst all children develop their understanding (and develop physically) at different, individual rates, it is important to know at what age it would be advisable to talk about different issues. Check out the [progression statements](#) in 'Goodness and Mercy' RHSE for Church Schools. These will give you a guide on the themes that are appropriate for different age ranges.



**Good tip:** If a young child wants to talk about a matter that is more appropriate for much older children or young people, it would be good to ask them where they had heard the words, or what has happened that has caused them to want to talk about the subject.

If, at any time, you are worried about the themes your child wants to talk about, or has knowledge of, please do contact your school's Designated Safeguarding Lead. Their details will be on the school website, and the school office will also be able to put you in contact – even if the school is closed due to lockdown.

## When is a good time to talk?

-  Talk whenever your child is asking curious questions. All parents and carers want their child to be safe, so talking about healthy and safe relationships mustn't feel like a 'taboo' or 'no-go' zone for children.
-  When you're running your child's bath or helping them with things like getting dressed or applying sun cream.
-  When you are walking together, whether it's on the way home from school, or a weekend walk to the shops, you'll feel more at ease as you stroll and chat together.
-  Car journeys are also a great time to talk.
-  When your child is wearing their swimwear is a great time to talk about the idea that what's covered by your pants and your swimwear is private. People may overhear your conversation at a swimming pool, so bear this in mind as you talk.
-  If they've had a lesson about personal relationships at school, ask them what they remember when they get home.
-  If their favourite programme is handling a sensitive storyline encourage them to talk about anything that upsets them.
-  Reading and discussing age-appropriate books and resources, some of which are referenced in this guide.
-  Playing a computer game, or on an app, there may be opportunities to talk about how characters relate to each other.

## Top Ten Tips for Parents:

1. From the very beginning always refer to parts of their bodies by the correct terms, for example, boys have a penis and girls have a vagina.
2. Ensure they are aware of the 4 parts of their body no one should touch unless they need help and allow them to: the genital area (penis, vagina), bottom, chest, and mouth.
3. Reassure them they can come to you if ANYONE touches them or asks them to keep a secret. Secrets are not OK.
4. Never expect or force them to kiss people goodbye etc. We suggest that blowing kisses, shaking hands or a “high five” can be a good alternative.
5. Don’t encourage or tease about “boyfriends” or “girlfriends”. All children will have friends who are boys and girls. Feeling pressured by this can lead to problems at school and with peers. Let them be children and enjoy their friendships, there is plenty of time for closer relationships when they get older.
6. Talk to your children about how your family values and the school’s ethos affect relationships and the way we respect and behave with others.
7. Help children to understand and respect the values and make up of other families, different to your own.
8. Remember, not all children will identify with typical gender stereotypes, and that in later in life, not all young people will identify as being heterosexual.
9. Tell them they can always speak to you as a parent / carer, or a trusted adult within school, to ask about things that they have seen/heard and don’t understand (again don’t assume they know this).
10. As a parent or carer, keep the channels of communication going, be interested. Who are their friends at school? Who are their friends on-line? Make time to talk.

## Talking to Very Young Children (3-6 year olds)

A focus for this age group is learning about healthy and safe relationships, about boundaries and what is and isn't appropriate when it comes to touching—or being touched—by other people.



The NSPCC has excellent resources to support parents in talking to very young children about safe relationships, and to protect them from harm.

The PANTS campaign aims

to make these conversations as natural as those you will already be having about road safety, and safety in the home. The website signposts to other recommended books and resources to share. Some are listed at the end of this guidance.

Reviews from parents (seen on Amazon and other sites) tell us that the books are bright, colourful, fun, and quickly become children's favourites, making the conversation around the content easy and natural to start. The books also equip children with simple skills and confidence to keep themselves safe.

At this age, your child might begin asking how babies are made. This is usually because other babies being born either in their own family, or in their friends' families. Telling children their own birth story, lets you tailor

the details to your family's specific situation. Just be sure to note that your child's birth story is just one of many ways that families are formed.



'Bodies, Babies and Bellybuttons' by Lynette Smith is a book for parents and children to read together to answer questions like 'Where do babies come from?', 'Why

is my body different?' and 'What is sex?' This book covers aspects of body science and will help children identify the private areas of the body using their scientific names, which will help educate them and keep them safe.

It's important to introduce children of this age group to the idea that families and relationships can be built in various ways. Families are so different, from a mum and dad, or single parent, to adopted or fostered children, multi-generational families, families with two mums or two dads, or a mixed family with children with different mums and dads. Many children have friends and regular contact with non-traditional families, but if they don't, it's important to have a few good books that aren't just about traditional 'nuclear', heterosexual families.

There are some more books recommended at the end of this guidance.

## Talking to Primary aged children (6-11)



At this age, it's important to discuss how to safely explore digital spaces - even if your child won't be using the internet unsupervised, or have a social media account, for a few more years. Establish rules around talking to strangers and sharing photos online, as well as what to do if your child comes across something that makes them feel uncomfortable. Children will already be very familiar with the benefits of the internet, as it is an integral part of most families' lives for work, for day to day living, for keeping in touch, for doing homework.

It is equally important that children know how to keep themselves safe, and respect others online. That the same principles apply to online relationships as to face-to-face relationships, including the importance of respect for others online, even when we might be anonymous. People sometimes behave differently online, including by pretending to be someone they are not. So, children need help to carefully consider their online friendships and sources of information, including making sure they know about the risks associated about communicating with people they have never met.

Children and families need to understand and use the rules for keeping safe online, how to recognise risks, harmful content and

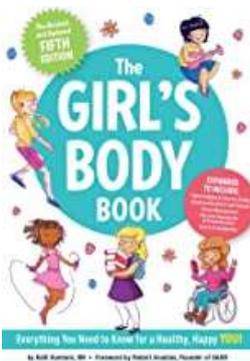
contact and how to report them.

The '[Think you know](#)' website for online safety for children and young people, has a lot of advice for parents and activities and games for children of different ages, to help them stay safe online, and spot pressuring or manipulative behaviour.

[Band Runner](#) is a fun interactive game that helps 8-10 year olds learn how to stay safe from risks they might encounter online.



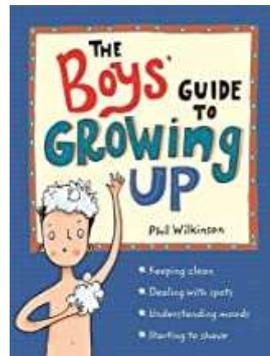
By the age of around 10 it might be time to explain the mechanics of sex to children: the science of reproduction. These conversations should emphasise that sex should happen in the context of healthy, loving and consenting relationships. Children around this age should also know that in the UK it is unlawful to have sex until you are 16.



Talking about sex can go hand-in-hand with another key topic: puberty. It's completely normal for puberty to begin at any point from the ages of 8 to 14. The process can take up to

4 years. The average age for girls to begin puberty is 11, while for boys the average age is 12. But it's different for everyone, so don't worry if your child reaches puberty before or after their friends.

This topic can start as a discussion about how bodies change as we grow. For example, you could compare photos of when they were little with what they look like now. It's important to remember and ensure that girls don't get one message and boys get another message. Children shouldn't learn just



about their own bodies, but also other bodies. Talking about the issues of puberty remains an important job for parents because not all of a child's information comes from reliable or trusted sources.

Don't wait for your child to come to you with questions about his or her changing body — that day may never arrive, especially if your child doesn't know it's OK talk to you about this sensitive topic.

For children of this age, life is full of emotional and social changes, and children may struggle with body image issues. Talking to your children allows the chance to check about how they're feeling and what they're wondering about. Emphasize that the changes they are experiencing, and the way they feel about them is normal.

[Kidshealth](http://Kidshealth) has a range of great advice for parents on how to talk to children about puberty.

## Answering children's questions

When your child asks a question about something relating to relationships and sex, it is helpful to dig a bit deeper before you answer to make sure that you are answering what is really on their mind. Sometimes they just want to know about one thing. You don't need to tell them everything at once.

Praise them for asking you the question.

After you have answered ask them if they have any more questions.

These sentences may be helpful as you respond.

- Great question - why do you want to know?
- I'll have to think about that for a while - let's talk about it again tomorrow.
- Interesting, where did you hear about that?
- I wonder what you mean? Can you say a bit more?
- I can tell you all about it if you are happy to listen; let's go for a walk and talk.
- Tell me a bit more about that so I can understand what you mean.
- Let's look it up together - this book has a brilliant chapter on that topic.
- Everyone's different so let's make sure we're always kind.
- Everyone's family is unique; tell me some more about what your friends said.

## Here are some questions that children might ask and possible answers:



You know your child and your family context so you will be the person to decide how to answer your child's questions. These are some possible responses to help you answer.

Q. Why does my best friend have 2 dads?

A. Families can be different but valuing, being respectful and loving each other are most important.

Q. Why can't boys have babies?

A. Let's remind ourselves of the difference between boys' and girls' bodies.

Q. What is condom?

A. That's a really interesting question, where have you heard that word before?

Sometime people want to have sex to show that they love each other but it's not the right time to make a baby. A condom stops a baby being made.

Q. Why do people have sex?

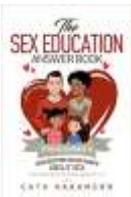
A. It is an enjoyable way of sharing love between two people and starting a baby if they choose to.

Q If a baby is made by a man and a woman, why do some children have two mummies or two daddies?

*A. All babies are made by a man and a woman but sometimes the man may choose to live with another man or the woman with another woman afterwards, instead of being mummy and daddy together.*

Q. Does everyone have a mummy and a daddy?

*A. Not always and it can be for lots of different reasons for example maybe one person might live somewhere else, or sometimes someone might have died, but the important thing is that families are loving and supportive.*



Q, How does someone know if they are in love?

*A. That's a really interesting question. Explain what being in love means to you, then ask the child what they think the word love means to try to establish their own understanding, and expectations for loving, honouring and respectful relationships.*

Q. How do you know if someone fancies you?

*A. Perhaps they look out for you, they may be a good friend, always thoughtful and kind towards you and want to spend time with you. This answer could be extended depending on the age of the child/young person and include conversations about appropriate close relationships in order to keep children safe.*

Q. How do you know if you are gay?

*A. What is your understanding of the word gay? Whatever a child/young person or adult feels about themselves it is important to support and respect them. It usually takes time for someone to work out if they are gay. It is not the same as having close friends of the same sex.*

## Talking to secondary aged children and young people

Teenagers and their families are of course all different from each other depending on their background, ethnic origin, family culture and faith, but there are some things that they have in common. Between the ages of 12 and 19 young people are developing physical, emotional and sexual maturity. They are also establishing an individual identity separate from their family. They are starting a potentially exciting time of their life, with many new horizons opening up and personal choices to make. But it can also be frightening and confusing and may make them feel insecure.



Parents really make a difference. Most young people name their parents as one of the biggest influences in their decisions about relationships and sex. Young people who have frequent conversations with their parents about safe and respectful relationships, and about sex, are more likely to delay sex until they are older, and practice safe sex when they do become sexually active.

The school curriculum for healthy, safe relationships and sex education includes information on the benefits of delaying sex,

safer sex, birth control and respectful relationships. But nothing compares to the influence you have as a parent on a day-to-day basis. That's why talking about relationships, sex and sexuality at home is important even if your teenager is getting the facts at school.

It's important for you to share your personal and family values about relationships. It is also important to ensure young people can keep themselves safe through talking confidently and openly to you about their thoughts, feelings, worries and activities, even though they might not fit with your family values.

**Be up to date and be real.** Try to keep up with the trending themes on TV and social media so that you can talk openly and dispel myths and rumours. Provide accurate information, and pointers to trusted websites, whilst respecting their intelligence and curiosity. Above all, avoid talking down to children and young people about relationships and sex.

**Empower your children.** Let them know they deserve to feel respected in their relationships, to have their own space, to keep their friends, to include their family, and to feel good about who they are. Teach them to expect give-and-take, but that, in the end, a good relationship helps you to be more of who you are already, and to feel even better about it.

**Set positive expectations about sex and relationships** Discussing what's good about sex will help them to have positive standards by which to judge sexual experiences in the future. Help your children know why sex is worth waiting for and give them some realistic guidance about how they will know when it might be worth moving forward.



**Use the media (the good, bad, and the ugly).** Use topics presented in daily media sources as prompts for conversations about sex and relationships. Avoid strong judgements, even about fictional characters as your children may think you will react to them in the same way if they ever got into the same situation. Talk through a situation or storyline on TV. This will give you some insight into your child's view of the world and give you the opportunity to offer your ideas for them to reflect on.

**Live by example.** If you have a good relationship with your spouse or partner let your children know it. Let them witness their adults disagree and then resolve it.

**We asked teachers in our schools to suggest some books for primary children  
These are their suggestions.**

We advise that parents read any books on these sensitive subjects all the way through to check that they are comfortable with the content before they share them with their children.



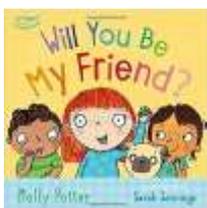
**Picnic in the Park** by Joe Griffiths and Tony Pilgrim. tells the story of Jason's birthday picnic and his guests. In so doing, it introduces

children to a range of family structures, including two- and one-parent families; adoptive and foster families; gay and lesbian families; and step-families. It also shows a diverse range of adults and children.



**'Let's Talk About the Birds and the Bees'** by Molly Potter. This book uses clear, easy to understand language to answer

complex questions about sex and relationships and covers all manner of tricky subjects from puberty to consent with delicate accuracy and honesty. Filled with bright, fun illustrations and helpful advice for parents and carers.



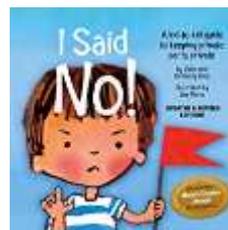
**'Will You Be My Friend?'** by Molly Potter. *Will You Be My Friend?* is ideal for starting conversations about making friends and

includes a guide for parents and carers about supporting a child if they are having friendship difficulties.



**'Some Parts are Not for Sharing'** by Julie K Frederico. Travel with a pair of friendly fish as

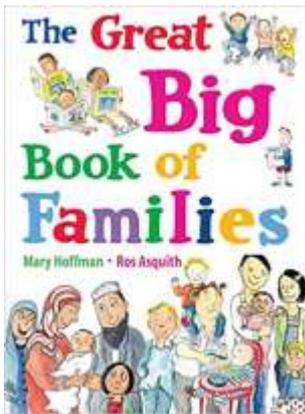
they learn about what parts of our bodies we share with others. Children will learn what the boundaries of appropriate touching are in a very non-threatening way.



**'I Said No!': a kid-to-kid guide to keeping private parts private** By Zach King and Kimberly King

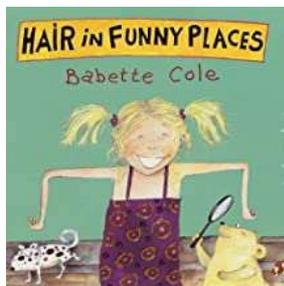
Explains what private body parts are, good and bad touching, scenarios of what someone may say, what to do if you feel

uncomfortable, who trusted adults are and what to do if no one listens or believes you. Includes advice on reading the book with children. This book is not suitable for every child, it may alarm some.



**‘The Great Big Book of Families’**  
by Mary Hoffman & Ros Asquith  
From a mum and dad, or single parent to two mums or two dads, from a mixed-race family to children

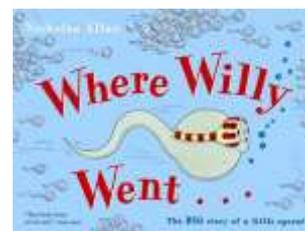
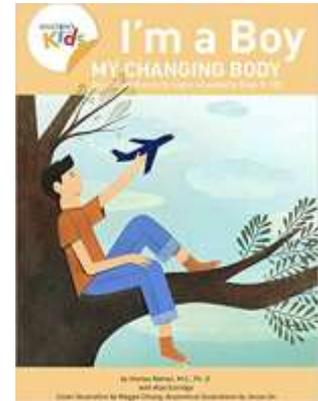
with different mums and dads, to families with a disabled member. The Great Big Book of Families offers a fresh, optimistic look through children's eyes at today's wide variety of family life: from homes, food, ways of celebrating, schools and holidays to getting around, jobs and housework, from extended families, languages and hobbies to pets and family trees.



**‘Hair in Funny Places’** by Babette Cole introduces the concept of the physical and emotional changes of puberty in such

a way, that it takes the ‘scariness’ out of puberty. Be aware that not all parents are comfortable with Babette Cole’s approach.

**‘I am a boy: My Changing Body’** by Shelley Metten. If you want a book about puberty for boys that doesn’t mention sex, I am a Boy is one of a series of books for boys and girls of different ages, from Anatomy for Kids.



**‘Where Willy Went’**, by Nicholas Allan: ‘A wonderful way to introduce the facts of life to young children in a

non-threatening, accessible way’ *Right Start*

**Note** – Inclusion on this list does not mean that the Diocese of Guildford Education Department is recommending these books for every child. You as their parent know what is appropriate for your child.

### **Sources, Links and References:**

[Department for Education: Sex and Relationship Education Guidance for Schools July 2020](#)

[Goodness and Mercy](#): RHSE for Church Schools.

[Valuing All God's Children](#): Guidance for Church of England schools on challenging homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying .

[Heartsmart](#) Supporting UK Church schools with building resilience, wellbeing and healthy relationships.

[Talking to children about sex and relationships](#) By Katherine Sellgren 2017, BBC News family and education reporter.

### **Resources for parents**

[NSPCC](#) has a range of advice for parents around sex and relationships, as well as other child safety matters.

[Think You Know](#): internet safety advice and guidance.

[A parents' guide to understanding teenagers](#) from Oxfordshire County Council.

[Sex Ed Rescue](#): a better way to talk to kids about sex – a website for parents with lots of resources and recommendations.

[Letterbox Library](#) is a useful one-stop-shop for books addressing equality matters, including gender identity and different family make-up, for young children (annual £5 membership fee).

### **These resources are written for parents with an active Christian Faith:**

**Care For The Family** <https://www.careforthefamily.org.uk/family-life/parent-support/everyday-parenting/support-for-all-parents>

**Lovewise** <https://lovewise.org.uk/christian-sex-education-resources-for-parents/>

**Parenting For Faith** <https://parentingforfaith.org/topics/primary-age>

The materials for talking to teenagers on both of these websites may also be useful.

Your child's school will also be able to recommend excellent books and other resources.