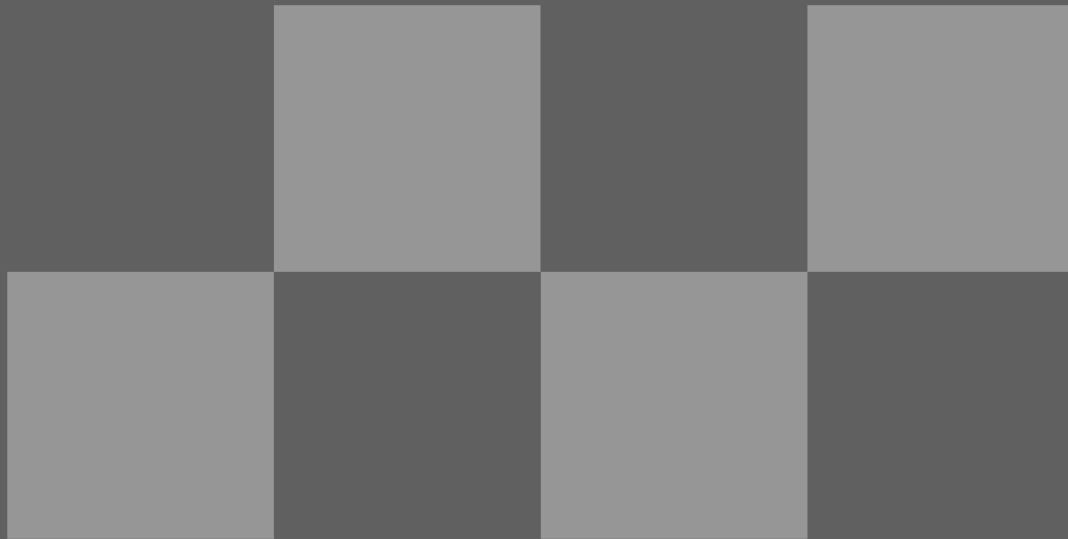


Sex & Relationship Education (SRE)

A Muslim Community Perspective



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<http://sreislamic.wordpress.com>

Quranic Reminder

We start with the best parental advice from the best book of guidance,

“And (remember) when Luqman said to his son when he was advising him: “O my son! Do not join others in worship with Allah. Indeed, joining others in worship with Allah is the highest wrong-doing.”

And we have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship, and his weaning is two years – give thanks to Me and to your parents – unto Me is the final destination.

But if they (both) strive with you to make you join in worship with Me others that of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not, but behave with them in the world kindly, and follow the path of him who turns to Me in repentance and obedience. Then to Me will be your return, and I shall tell you what you used to do.

“O my son! If it be (anything) equal to the weight of a grain of mustard seed, and though it be (hidden) in a rock, or in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth. Indeed, Allah is Subtle (in bringing out that grain), Well-Aware (of its place).

“O my son! Establish Salah, enjoin al-Ma’ruf (right) and forbid al-Munkar (wrong), and bear with patience whatever befalls you. Indeed, these are some of the important commandments ordered by Allah with no exemption.

“And turn not your face away from men with pride, nor walk (arrogantly) through the earth. Indeed, Allah likes not each arrogant boaster.

“And be moderate (or show no insolence) in your walking, and lower your voice. Indeed, the harshest of all voices is the voice (braying) of the Ass.”

[TMQ Surah Luqman; 31:13-19]

Contents

Quranic Reminder	02
Headline Values/Authors of report	04
Eyewitness Report from an SRE Lesson	05
Introduction to New Edition	06
SRE - The Need for a Muslim Community Perspective	07
SRE - The Legal Framework	09
SRE - An Islamic Framework	12
Case Study: Homosexuality in Schools	21
The Promotion of Homosexuality in Your Child's School	23
Guidance for Parents/Governors	24
References	25
Glossary of Terms/Appendix	26
Five Practical Ways to Support our Campaign	27

Headline Values

The following headlines from the national and local press cover the period February 2007 – April 2009.

Anger at sex lessons for five-year-olds

Teenage pregnancy rates rise

Sex lessons not halting rise in teenage pregnancy

Condoms to be advertised on television before watershed to stop teenage pregnancy

Outcry over explicit sex education video shown to five-year-olds

Schoolgirls as young as 11 to ask for morning-after-pill by text

Parents told: avoid morality in sex lessons

Government bypasses parents on sex education

Parents face court action for removing children from gay history lessons

Boy raped sister after sex lesson

Abortion rate hits record high among under-16s

Primary schools 'should celebrate homosexuality'

Pupils taught the meaning of swear words during sex ed class

Abuse of teachers by parents and pupils on the rise, says survey

Authors of Report

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Eyewitness Report from an SRE Lesson

The lesson described below was delivered to a year 6 class (10-11 year olds)

I am writing about the incident that took place in my school last year (the school is based in Tower Hamlets and there must have been at least 80% or so of the children that were Muslim).

Please excuse some of the language I may use here as it necessary to relay the true picture.

“...the Head told the teachers to give out the letters that allow the parents to opt out only the night before so parents have limited time in which to respond.”

I was playing a support teacher’s role in this lesson as I did not want to conduct the lesson myself. The teacher who led the class is generally a very nice person and was a good friend of mine. This, however did not affect his thoughts and beliefs about SRE. The staff (including me) had a meeting a few days before the lessons were taught and the Head told the teachers to give out the letters that allow the parents to opt out only the night before so parents have limited time in which to respond. Half of these letters hardly ever get to the parents anyway, as several children lose them and many parents are unable to read English.

The teacher started the lesson by showing a video which included a girl talking about how her breasts had developed over the years. It also had a boy who was discussing having crushes on girls. There were images of top shelf magazines.

After the video was shown the teacher started to discuss the topic in more detail and asked the class if they had any questions. The entire class remained silent. I was really surprised myself as that class was really loud during the rest of the year!

The teacher continued explaining other issues including “masturbation” which he also referred to as “wanking” and said that it lead to “a nice feeling”. He drew a picture of an erect penis on the white board and explained how this happens and what happens at the time of ejaculation. At the end of the lesson he conducted a quiz which the children had to participate in.

“He drew a picture of an erect penis on the white board and explained how this happens and what happens at the time of ejaculation.”

It was an extremely embarrassing incident for me, but as a fellow teacher I just had to keep quiet even though I was shocked at what he was talking about. All in all, it was a lesson I couldn’t believe I was seeing. Moreover, there were a majority of Muslims in the class. All this led me to believe that no matter what kind of policy or board of governors a school may have, an SRE lesson (like any other lesson) can easily stray from the written syllabus. No one can really question what the teacher wants to do in their classroom once the doors are closed. We also know that there are many teachers who are openly gay and I wouldn’t be surprised at all if they use such lessons to promote their beliefs.

It is really very difficult to know what’s going on in each and every class so I think the best thing is to simply remove children from SRE classes unless you can yourself as a parent or concerned person sit through the lesson and be allowed to view for yourself at first hand what is being taught.

Even then, when teachers are being watched, they alter their teaching style in order to please the observer. I guess we have to really make a lot of du’a for the Ummah too as, ultimately, the ability to do good and abstain from Haraam is in His hands.

Primary School Teacher

Name withheld

Introduction to New Edition

We embarked upon writing this report after realising the hoops Muslim parents were forced to jump through by schools when they enquired what their children were being taught in Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) lessons. Muslim parents were rightly concerned for the values of their children in a society in which values no longer matter. Protecting our children from the excesses of society is a job in itself, but schools rightly or wrongly have been trusted by parents to educate their children for the better and not to re-inforce the lack of values that surround them. Our contention is that the philosophy of SRE in schools is not driven by a clear values framework that teaches the importance of acknowledging and acting based upon acceptable boundaries of behaviour. Instead the ethos is values-free. The government and schools may talk about the importance of parents instilling values in their children, but the role of the school is to promote harm reduction approaches by providing advice, guidance and in later years practical means to access contraception to make 'safe and responsible choices'. This is inevitable when the moral decline in society is not important for government. When banks fail, money is pumped into them to stop them from collapsing, when society fails to live up to a moral framework and when everyone can feel and sense 'Broken Britain', the government decides to enforce statutory SRE at the age of five instead of dealing with the moral vacuum that has engulfed society.

...the philosophy of SRE in schools is not driven by a clear values framework that teaches the importance of acknowledging and acting based upon acceptable boundaries of behaviour.

We cannot and will not accept the enforced sexualisation of our children. It is very clear Muslim parents across the country feel the government and schools are complicit in robbing our children of core values that promote a stable family life through marriage. Schools do not seek parental input in what they teach and better schools only go so far as inviting parents to an open evening 'to view the materials' taught in SRE classes. This is not the collaborative approach that we are told should exist between parents and schools. Consultation is non-existent and schools actively place obstacles in the way of parents exercising the right to withdraw their children from SRE classes.

Governing bodies in flashpoint cases turn to the headteacher to do what is essentially their job. The strategic direction of a school as set out in school policies is meant to be determined by the governing body, not the head teacher and certainly not the local authority. Governing bodies do not live up to their role as critical friends, asking the difficult questions to the head teacher on the impact of decisions on the most important asset of any school - the children.

The original report sought to outline to parents and governors what is and is not compulsory in terms of SRE delivery and the immense untapped power of governing bodies to shape SRE policy in line with the community the school serves. We felt it was necessary to provide a framework for both parents and governors to appreciate the Islamic values that must underpin SRE teaching for Muslim children as well as a practical focus for Muslim governors to address the teaching of SRE in schools. No sooner had we finished this research, the government decided to make PSHEE (Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education) of which SRE is a part, statutory in all state schools from the age of five. Our awareness raising strategy had to respond to what promises to be a dangerous course driven by a desire on the part of government to stem the tide of teenage pregnancy.

...we challenge many of the agendas in our schools, the values free approach to SRE, the acceptance of the sexualisation of our children and the campaign to normalise homosexual family units.

In this revised report, we challenge many of the agendas in our schools, the values free approach to SRE, the acceptance of the sexualisation of our children and the campaign to normalise homosexual family units. If we cannot win this values argument, the future this society will be nothing short of bleak, a moral meltdown which will engulf the Muslim community which does not and cannot live in a bubble protected from the effects of this society. This Muslim community campaign has immediate goals, to actively resist this values attack by the government but in the longer term we have to protect our Islamic values, wherever and however they are being attacked.

Sex and Relationship Education

The need for a Muslim Community Perspective

As Muslim parents, teachers and school governors, the subject of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) has always been an uncomfortable one. On the one hand we are aware of the falling moral standards in society with a prevalent culture that at times encourages promiscuity, discourages seriousness and marriage and despite the abundance of information, leaves our children ever more confused. On the other hand we are very much aware that the silence of our community and some Muslim parents based upon a misguided notion of 'tradition' leads to our children developing dual personalities. At school, children learn, socialise and develop behaviours that often reflect the excesses of wider society. Whereas, in the home children are brought up in a way that hampers their ability to deal with the challenges of life in the world around them. Unfortunately, many of our community institutions have failed to advance attitudes and approaches to childhood development relevant to living in the West. With regards to SRE it is often believed that children should not be informed at all so that the subject has become a taboo in some Muslim households. This traditional stance has failed our children and allowed them to fall prey to ill informed and misguided information.

“...over the last 10 years levels of chlamydia rose by 508% in teenage boys and 238% in teenage girls and herpes rose by 52% in teenage boys and 38% in teenage girls.”

This paper will challenge viewpoints on both sides. We believe the current approaches to SRE as often applied in state education are insufficient in dealing with the challenges faced by children. The UK has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Western Europe¹, a recent UNICEF report placed Britain at the bottom of the league of 21 developed countries for children's well-being.² The Independent Advisory Group on Sexual Health and HIV reported in June 2007 that UK teenagers are facing a “sexual health crisis”, describing the increase in sexually-transmitted infections and high teenage pregnancy rates as “disturbing”.³ The Institute for Public Policy Research highlighted the shocking discovery that over the last 10 years levels of chlamydia rose by 508% in teenage boys and 238% in teenage girls and herpes rose by 52% in teenage boys and 38% in teenage girls.⁴ Report after report paints a picture of worsening standards. Amid this chaotic picture the government is proposing statutory SRE from the age of five in all state schools.

The current government provisions mandate teaching SRE in Key Stages 1 and 2 (5-11) of the National Science Curriculum. It also recommends (and Ofsted assesses) the teaching of the non-biological elements, typically this is taught within PSHE lessons. The PSHE element concentrates on the non-biological and emotional aspects of SRE and policies are developed for PSHE at the community and school level (as will be discussed in detail later). The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has developed advice on what it considers to be 'good practice'. Their self-proclaimed objective is to enable schools to establish SRE policies that, it argues, will better inform younger children.⁵ It is not our intention here to be alarmist or to paint a black and white picture of what is taking place in our schools. However, as teachers, parents and governors it is our informed view that current SRE provision in schools does not serve our children in developing a greater understanding of this subject nor does it serve to resolve some of the key concerns raised. It often creates more problems than it solves.

Let us turn to the current teaching of SRE at Primary level. The perceived wisdom is that 'good sex education' leads to better informed children and the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), teenage pregnancies etc. We do not object to this logic and, as will be discussed, good sex education can lead to these intended aims. We would object to the term 'good sex education' as it obscures the real issues. Who defines what good sex education is? Put in another way, our contention is not with teaching SRE but how it is currently being taught in many schools. We believe good practice for some amounts to an acceptance that children will inevitably engage in sexual relationships with children of the opposite sex from an early age. As a result of this flawed premise, the focus is on preventing the spread of STIs and early pregnancy, rather than challenging unacceptable behaviour. At the heart of this misguided notion is that SRE should provide children with 'choices' on how to ultimately have sex in a 'safer way'.

To illustrate the way SRE is being taught, it is important to review some of the written and multimedia material available for teachers at key stage 2 (ages 7 to 11) directly taken from TeacherNet.⁶ One such booklet titled 'Changing Times', published by AVERT states, 'There is no set time to begin having sexual relationships (Sex & Relationships, 2006:3). Under the title 'Getting Sexual' it reassures children, 'If a relationship gets sexual it can be very special. For a lot of people it's a normal part of going out with someone'.⁷ Under the title 'Feeling Curious', 'You might want to do sexual things like touching, kissing or masturbating with someone else because you feel curious or want to experiment'.⁸ The criterion for engaging in sexual relationships according to AVERT is '...to make up your own mind about what you feel and what you do'.⁹ Under the title 'Doing Sexual Things Together' it argues, 'The first sexual thing people do together are often kissing, cuddling and holding hands'.¹⁰ Under the title 'Sexual Intercourse' it crudely states, 'Sexual intercourse is sometimes called making love...' it then lists a series of crude words for intimate relations and continues to illustrate just what it means in graphic detail.¹¹ The booklet continues in much the same way, focusing on contraception, and reveals how children under 16 can buy condoms from chemists¹²; it gives a guide to sexual activity in step by step form¹³, and explores 'anal intercourse'.¹⁴ The booklet ends with advice if a girl becomes pregnant or fears contracting Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). In primary schools children are being exposed to comics such as the fpa publication 'Let's Grow with Nisha and Joe', which promotes the de-contextualised study of the external sexual organs of boys and girls and children are asked to compare and contrast the differences. Many schools use Channel 4's Living and Growing DVD, which promotes masturbation to children and shows a stick man and woman engaging in the sexual act. Children as young as five have been shown this DVD, which is the fourth best seller for Channel 4 learning. There has also been a push for books which promote homosexuality to be included within schools for children to read. This will be dealt with in greater detail in our case study on LGBT week at George Tomlinson Primary School in Leytonstone.

“Many schools use Channel 4's Living and Growing DVD, which promotes masturbation to children and shows a stick man and woman engaging in the sexual act”

The above illustrates an example of what *can* be taught not what *is* being taught, as what is taught depends on the school's SRE policy, which is formulated by the governing body. This booklet is available as a teaching resource for key stage 2. Anecdotal evidence suggests they have been used to teach 7 to 11 year olds in some schools. The teaching of SRE is left to the discretion of the teacher. The wide array of resources¹⁵ available allows teachers to explain sensitive issues based upon their own prejudices, biases and their own interpretation of what constitutes 'good practice'. Schools we are aware of, including schools with a large Muslim constituency often implement local authority template policies which, as argued, add to the problem and often misinform. Their policies are mostly based upon changing value systems guided by the declining moral attitudes rather than clear beliefs as to how children should be nurtured, educated and developed. Most material that is produced on the subject is morally ambiguous, establishing unclear guidelines and avoids discussing what is right and wrong.

SRE is now taught to younger children, as well as being subjected to a mass of information through advertising, media, school and the playground. Yet there are no discernible signs of positive change amongst this vulnerable group. All available research suggests the situation has gone from bad to worse. Children from the Muslim community are not immune from this dire situation. It is our informed view that the Muslim community is often oblivious to the problem of the early sexualisation of our children. Furthermore, we believe parents in our community are unaware of what is being taught in SRE lessons. It is also our view that Muslims should participate in schools as governors to engage with developing the curriculum. We believe Muslim school governors can play an important role in establishing an alternative way of approaching SRE, not just so that our community can benefit but that the wider community can be won over to this alternative approach.

We present through this paper, our contribution to this subject. We tackle it by explaining the legal position on SRE and PSHEE at primary level and establish the Islamic viewpoint on sex education. Islam, as a *Deen* (way of life) revealed to deal with life's problems has, for too long, been absent from the details of our lives. It is only by referring to the *Ahkhaam Shari'ah* (Islamic Laws) that Muslims can find solutions and others can benefit from our guidance.

Sex and Relationship Education- The Legal Framework

What is Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)?

The legal framework for SRE stems from the 1996 Education Act and the Learning and Skills Act 2000. This brought together all previous legislation and obligated local authorities, schools and governing bodies to provide SRE in both primary and secondary schools.

Some aspects of SRE are taught throughout the various key stages as elements of the science curriculum. Schools are required by law to have an up to date policy that details the content and organisation of SRE outside the National Curriculum. The biological aspects of SRE are mandatory and are taught through the science curriculum. The emotional and developmental aspects of SRE are typically taught in Personal Social, Health & Economic Education (PSHEE) lessons.

This report focuses on the PSHEE aspect of SRE policy (i.e. those aspects that are taught outside the mandatory national curriculum). Although there may be areas of concern in the science curricula, what is taught is not subject to parental guidance. The SRE policy, on the other hand, is determined by school governors through parental consultation.

What guidelines have the government set for teaching SRE?

The 1996 Education Act obliges all schools to have an up to date policy that details the delivery of SRE over and above the mandatory Science National Curriculum. PSHEE and citizenship classes are the recommended avenues for teaching SRE by the government in primary schools (key stages 1-2). Schools do have the option to give a statement of decision not to provide SRE outside the National Curriculum Science Order, this means a school can opt out of teaching SRE as part of PSHEE. Secondary schools (key stages 3-4) are required by law, to provide information on AIDS, HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections at key stage 4.

Whilst it is acknowledged that the biological aspects of SRE are mandatory, it is generally recommended by Ofsted that teaching should go beyond science. This decision was in part reached in order to help children negotiate through emotional and physical changes as well as to combat possible misinformation from their peers. It is widely accepted that children need a great deal of support from schools. However, these wider aspects should not be developed and taught in a void. The government has issued clear guidance that schools must write a policy on SRE that “reflect(s) parents’ wishes and the culture of the community the school serves”.¹⁶ Therefore, the faith and culture of pupils in schools with a significant proportion of Muslims should be reflected in the design and delivery of SRE. In a circular from the DfES¹⁷ the government was even more specific when it mentioned; “Schools should ensure that pupils are protected from teaching and materials which are inappropriate, having regard to the age and cultural background of the pupils concerned.”¹⁸ In addition, far from promoting pre-marital relationships and alternative lifestyles, the government’s guidelines state that SRE should “contribute to promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at school and society, and preparing pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.”¹⁹

In its detailed report on SRE released in 2002, Ofsted highlights the need to plan and deliver SRE in a way that meets the needs of pupils from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities. Ofsted recommends the need to, consult with the wider community, establish a clear framework of values, set out guidance on teaching methods, spell out arrangements for pupils withdrawn from aspects of SRE and agree a clear timetable for reviewing and evaluating processes.²⁰

Ultimately, it is the governing body of a school in consultation with parents that agree an SRE policy. Governing bodies can also opt-out of teaching the non-statutory parts in PSHEE lessons.

What does the repeal of Section 28 mean for schools?

One major concern parents have is the impact the repeal of section 28 would have on the promotion of homosexuality in schools. The Local Government Act 1988 prohibited local authorities from intentionally promoting or teaching homosexuality in any maintained school. Yet it never applied to schools, only to local authorities. There are no legal barriers to teachers and staff discussing issues around sexual orientation in the classroom. But as a result of the devolution of power to individual governing bodies, they have the right to decide what is and is not taught.

What is the Role of the Governing Body?

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 places responsibility for determining SRE in the hands of the governing body. The role of the governing body in determining school policy is crucial since they agree the framework, details and delivery of SRE. As mentioned earlier, in primary schools, the governing body can decide whether there is a need to teach SRE beyond the statutory requirements. In addition, in cases where SRE is delivered, governors help to decide the content and delivery of lessons. In both primary and secondary stages, the governing body should, in consultation with parents, develop policies which reflect the parents' wishes and the community they serve.²¹ In practice, link governors are often selected to work with the school's PSHEE and Citizenship Coordinator on policy and curriculum development for SRE.²²

This means that governing bodies must not only provide the broad aims and guidelines but should also be involved closer to the point of delivery. They can and should specify textbooks and teaching aids as well as approval of lesson plans as part of what is considered good practice. Such a level of involvement would prevent variation and deviation from an agreed framework and would also help prevent the personal beliefs and attitudes of teachers influencing the teaching of SRE as required through government guidelines. Since monitoring and review are also necessary, governors may also propose random monitoring of lesson plans and observe classes.

It is important to stress that although teachers are involved in the frontline delivery of SRE, they are not free to decide what and how to teach SRE. Ultimately it is the governing body of a school, in consultation with parents, that agree the SRE policy, amend the existing policy, develop their own policy or opt-out of teaching the non-statutory elements of PSHEE.

What is the role of the Local Community, Parents and Mosques?

The government acknowledges that SRE delivery is not the sole mandate of schools and there is a wide-range of stakeholders that can help to plan and deliver SRE lessons. The DfES (now DCSF) advises: "People in the wider community have much to offer at all levels of planning and delivery of SRE, bringing a new perspective and offering specialised knowledge, experiences and resources."²³ These people may include youth workers, peer educators and visitors. Parents have a right to know when the school utilises the services of outside agencies in the delivery of SRE. In addition, all people from the wider community who can assist in the delivery of SRE have to work within the framework decided by the governing body of the

school. Another point of note is that the government places a lot of emphasis on the use of visitors in delivering SRE both formally and informally and this could involve representatives from local mosques. Peer educators could include both young people and parents from the local Muslim community. They could all provide invaluable input from an Islamic perspective.

In addition, LA PHSE advisory services, Health Promotion Units and local and national community groups are well positioned to give schools, teachers and parents support in SRE delivery. One issue to bear in mind is the plethora of organisations and groups that exist to help both youth and parents deal with SRE. Whilst they may be staffed by experienced professionals, such organisations may look at issues from a

different perspective, often a socially liberal one, and this may present problems for Muslim parents as they may promote ideas that contradict Islamic values.

Concerns may be raised that local authorities could override or interfere with SRE policies in schools, however again the governments guidelines are quite clear: “Local authorities play an important, supportive role, for example in suggesting materials to aid teachers, but ultimate decisions about sex education rest with school governing bodies, having regard to the Government’s Sex and Relationship Guidance and in consultation with parents.”²⁴ Hence, LAs operate in a largely advisory capacity and schools themselves are responsible for the design and delivery of the non-statutory elements of SRE.

In addition, every local education authority is obliged by law to have a standing advisory council on religious education (SACRE). Whilst the remit of this body primarily relates to religious education; it may be useful in advising schools with large Muslim communities on SRE provision. Indeed in a report by the BBC conducted in March 2007 in Newham, a student wing of SACRE requested schools to take faith into account when teaching SRE.²⁵

Finally, the Home Office document “Supporting Families” recognizes parents as playing a supportive role in providing support to their children with regards to SRE. Local authorities have co-ordinators who can encourage schools to identify and develop approaches for supporting parents.²⁶ Supplementing SRE may be particularly important for Muslim parents where aspects of SRE teaching are against Islamic teachings.

Do parents have the right to Opt-Out?

Parents *do* have the right to withdraw their children from the non-statutory elements of SRE. Although this is the case, in practice, very few parents choose to do so. According to Ofsted, only 0.04% of parents/carers chose to withdraw their children from SRE in 2002.²⁷ Section 17 of the Education Reform Act 1988 states that parents do not have to give reasons for their decision neither do they have to say whether they have made alternative arrangements. Guidance from the DCSF states that schools should consult parents about its SRE policy and be informed about what is taught. If parents feel strongly enough about the policy they should be advised to see the Head Teacher or senior SRE coordinator and if parents or carers still insist on withdrawing their children from the lessons it is the duty of the school to provide the parents or carers with information on the lessons missed and other sources of support for ideas on how to fulfil the task of educating the child.²⁸

As a concluding observation, Ofsted mentioned in its report on SRE in 2002 that in general, content and delivery of SRE provision across the country tended to be poor. In addition, a timetable and means of review were lacking in many schools.²⁹

Summary:

- There are two aspects to SRE. The biological aspects that are taught in science lessons and the non-biological aspects typically taught in PSHEE lessons.
- School governing bodies are responsible for formulating an SRE policy and guidance from DfES/DCSF encourages community and parental consultation.
- A well-formed SRE policy should reflect the views of the community and the cultural background of pupils and schools are not allowed to impose policies without due consultation.
- Parents can withdraw their children from non-mandatory aspects of SRE, typically taught in PSHEE lessons.

Sex and Relationship Education An Islamic Framework

Muslim parents have an important responsibility to raise their children to be Islamic personalities. Living in a society where emphasis is no longer placed on moral values, this can often be an uphill task. Despite the dangerous environment and the numerous other obstacles to achieving this objective, parents need to place a lot of emphasis on parenting. If we do not provide for the spiritual and moral upbringing of our children no one else will. If we cannot raise them, our children's peers, TV soaps, celebrity role models, rap/hip hop lyrics will fill the void; whichever of these takes over our responsibility, the resultant effects on family life will be just as detrimental.

As one author frames it,

Where children are not aided by their families in learning skills to act as Muslims in the non-Muslim world, they will invent their own ways of dealing with school peer pressure.³⁰

Before we address a basic framework for Sex Education from an Islamic perspective, we present – by way of reminder and advice – the obligations of the Muslim parent.

Section I: Parental Obligations

I. PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alaihi wasallam) emphasised the duty of care of a father to his family when he said,

“Each of you is a guardian and is responsible for those whom he is in charge of...a man is the guardian of his family and is responsible for those under his care...So each one of you is a guardian and is responsible for what he is entrusted with.” [Bukhari and Muslim]

Parents have a responsibility to feed and clothe their children, but that is only a part of our duty.

Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala) commands believing mothers and fathers,

“Oh you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families against a fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones...” (TMQ 66:6)

`Ali bin Abi Talhah reported that Ibn `Abbas (RadiAllahu anhu) said regarding this verse;

“Work in the obedience of Allah, avoid disobedience of Allah and order your families to remember Allah, then Allah will save you from the Fire.”

Qatadah ibn al-Nu'man (RadiAllahu anhu) said,

“He commands obedience to Allah, to not disobey Allah, he orders his family to obey His orders and helps them to act upon His orders. When one sees disobedience, he stops them and forbids them from doing it.”

“Ad-Dahhak and Muqatil also commented on this verse by observing; “It is an obligation for the Muslim to teach his near family members what Allah has made obligatory for them and what Allah has forbidden for them.”³¹

“Oh you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families against a fire (Hell) whose fuel is men and stones...”
(TMQ 66:6)

In a narration that epitomises the duty of a father to his child, a man once came to ‘Umar ibn Al-Khattab (ra), the second Khalifah of Islam, complaining of his son’s disobedience to him. ‘Umar summoned the boy and spoke of his disobedience to his father and his neglect of his rights. The boy replied:

“O Amir al-Mu’minin! Hasn’t a child rights over his father?”

“Certainly”, replied ‘Umar.

“What are they, Amir al-Mu’minin?”

“That he should choose his mother, give him a good name and teach him the Book (the Qur’an).”

“O Amir al-Mu’minin! My father did nothing of this. My mother was a Magian (fire worshipper). He gave me the name of Ju’alaan (meaning dung beetle or scarab) and he did not teach me a single letter of the Qur’an.”

Turning to the father, ‘Umar said:

“You have come to me to complain about the disobedience of your son. You have failed in your duty to him before he has failed in his duty to you; you have done wrong to him before he has wronged you.”³²

Parents need to take the lead in ensuring their children are brought up with Islamic values. We cannot complain about their behaviour unless we have questioned how we have discharged our responsibility as parents.

2. THE PARENTAL BOND

The responsibility of parents to raise children with Islamic values necessitates that parents have a strong relationship with their children and take an active interest in their upbringing.

The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alaihi wasallam) said, **“He is not one of us who does not have mercy for children and respect for our elders”**. (At-Tirmidhi)

“He is not one of us who does not have mercy for children and respect for our elders”. (At-Tirmidhi)

On more than one occasion, Allah’s Messenger (salAllahu alaihi wasallam) rebuked men for failing to kiss their children. This simple action builds a deep emotional bond between parent and child and lays the foundation for mercy and love.

It is reported that Al-Aqra' ibn Habis saw Allah's Messenger kissing his grandchild and said to the Prophet, **“I have ten children, but I have never kissed any one of them.”** The Prophet said, **“He who does not show mercy (towards his children), no mercy would be shown to him”** (Al-Bukhari).

Also, a Bedouin man asked the Prophet, **“Do you kiss your sons?”** The Prophet replied, **“Yes.”** The Bedouin said, **“We do not.”** The Prophet said to him, **“What can I do for you if Allah has removed mercy from your heart?”** (Al-Bukhari).

The home must be filled with affection between the parents and between the parents and children. There must be an open atmosphere where questions can be asked and parents answer them in a way the age of the child allows.

One of the most difficult subjects parents will ever have to broach with their children is sex. Parents must bear in mind that the environment in which their children will grow up is a powerful influencing factor on our children. This does not mean that low morals are a fact of life; it means that children need to be moulded with Islamic ideas, practices and an outlook founded upon firm Islamic principles.

That is all the more reason for the establishment of a strong relationship between parents and their children.

...Parents should ideally be able to give their children advice on sexual matters in accordance with the teachings of Islam. However many parents may not feel comfortable doing this. Nevertheless, it is the parental duty to ensure that receive both correct information and protection from immorality.³³

3. SEX EDUCATION – A TABOO THAT MUST BE BROKEN

The first point of acceptance must be that parents must ensure their children are given appropriate information about sex, relationships and related matters. This is not merely due to the reality in which we live, but it is a widely accepted Islamic opinion that teaching these areas comes within the general duties of the parental obligation of *tarbiyyah* (Islamic Education). It is important that sex education is not a reaction to events nor a reaction to misinformation acquired in the playground but is presented throughout their childhood in a way appropriate to a child's age. It is also important that sex education is value driven and based upon obedience to Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala).

Sheikh `Abdul-Majeed Subh, a prominent Azhari scholar, states:

“Those who think that sex education is not allowed in Islam are completely wrong. The books of Islamic jurisprudence expose several topics promoting sexual awareness, including discussion of menstruation, childbirth bleeding, pregnancy, delivery, rules of sexual intercourse, rules of marriage, taking a bath (Ghusl) after sexual intercourse... and rules related to the punishment for committing adultery or fornication. All these rulings are dealt with in the books of Islamic jurisprudence in a moral and scientific manner”.³⁴

In his book *al-Majmu`*, Imam an-Nawawi mentions that Imam Ash-Shafi'i is of the opinion that parents are under obligation to give their children such kind of sex education.³⁵

...Imam Ash-Shafi'i is of the opinion that parents are under obligation to give their children such kind of sex education.

The Messenger of Allah encouraged the asking of questions to ensure compliance to the *ahkaam* (laws) of Allah, `A'ishah (radiAllahu Anha) the prophet's wife said:

“Blessed are the women of the Ansar (the helpers). Shyness did not stand in their way of seeking knowledge about their religion.” [Bukhari and Muslim]

Children do need sex education consistent with their age and maturity but this must be firmly rooted within an Islamic framework. If this is the basic premise, parents cannot delegate this life-shaping task to teachers that may not share or appreciate Islamic values.

4. RELEVANT KNOWLEDGE

The Islamic tradition promotes speaking at the level of the person, doing otherwise can lead to rejection, misunderstanding and difficulty. It is reported that Ali (RadiAllahu anhu) said:

“Speak to the people with what they can recognise, do you want them to reject Allah and His Messenger?” (Bukhari). Ibn Hajar said in his *Fath*: ‘with what they recognise’ means ‘with what they understand.’³⁶

Also Ibn Mas'ud is reported as saying:

“You would not speak to any people about things they cannot understand except it will be source of *fitnah* for some.” Reported by Muslim.

Ibn Abbas provided apt advice on educating the people with ease when he said:

“Be divine, gentle and juristic (understanding), the divine (*rabbani*) is the one who educates the people with the easy knowledge before the difficult”. (Al-Bukhari).

Not only must the knowledge be based on the understanding of the child but it also must be relevant. Relevancy here relates to knowledge intended for application. So it is not expected that children should be taught about the detailed aspects of human procreation until they have biologically and mentally developed so that this knowledge is understood with maturity.

Alongside the provision of relevant knowledge is the necessity to strike the correct tone so as not to trivialise the subject or make it frivolous.

5. THE AGE OF DISCERNMENT

Islam recognises that children need to be prepared for being *mukhallaf* (accountable). That is why the scholars of Islam understood an age before puberty when some of the *ahkaam* (laws) relating to modesty apply. For example Allah (subhanahu wa ta'al) commands, with regards to uncovering the 'awrah in front of children:

“O you who believe! Let your slaves and slave girls, and those among you who have not come to the age of puberty ask your permission (before they come to your presence) on three occasions: before Fajr (morning) Salaah (prayer), and while you put off your clothes for the noonday (rest), and after the 'Isha' (night) Salaah (prayer). (These) three times are of privacy for you; other than these times there is no sin on you or on them to move about, attending to each other. Thus Allaah makes clear the Ayaat (the Verses of this Qur'aan, showing proofs for the legal aspects of permission for visits) to you. And Allaah is All Knowing, All Wise” [TMQ 24:58]

The great scholar Abu Bakr al-Jassaas said in *Ahkaam al-Qur'aan* (3/464-465): **“Allaah has enjoined the child who understands about women's 'awrah to seek permission to enter at the three times, in the words “Let your slaves and slavegirls, and those among you who have not come to the age of puberty ask your permission (before they come to your presence)...”³⁷**

These times when Allaah has enjoined us to tell children to seek permission are times when people wear fewer clothes.

The great scholar Ibn 'Ashoor (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in his tafsir *al-Tahreer wa'l-Tanweer*:

“These times are times when household members would wear fewer clothes, and it would be reprehensible for their children to see their 'awrah, because that would leave an impression on the child's mind, as he would not be used to seeing it. And because children should be brought up to cover their 'awrah so that that will be like second nature to them when they grow up.”³⁸

What is therefore important is the age of discernment in the application of modest practice vis-à-vis the child.

Ibn Qudaamah said in *al-Mughni* (7/76): **“As for the boy, if he is still a small child and has not reached the age of discernment, it is not obligatory to cover before him.”³⁹**

This verse encourages parents to teach children to ask permission before entering bedrooms upon the age of discernment. The times of the day mentioned indicate periods when men and women may be changing.

If such an age has been specified in relation to the uncovering of the 'awrah, this indicates the impressionability of young children to images and ideas relating to sexuality in general. An issue that must be borne in mind when deciding what is taught to children.

As for what constitutes the age of discernment (also referred to as the age of discretion⁴⁰) it is understood as being the age between seven and ten.

The age of discernment is realised at the age of seven, the time when a child must be ordered to pray, for the Messenger of Allah said:

“Order your sons to pray when they turn seven, and chastise them (lightly - if they refuse) when they turn ten, and at that time, make them sleep in separate beds.” Recorded by Al-Hakim, Imam Ahmad, and Abu Dawud, and in another version it is said: **Order your children.**

This *hadith* not only orders parents to encourage their children to pray when they turn seven but also forbids girls and boys, even brother and sister from sleeping in the same bed under the same cover after the age of seven.

Therefore by the age of seven children are introduced to both *salah* (prayer) and *tahaara* (purification). Purification/personal hygiene naturally contextualises discussion about private parts 'without any unhealthy secretiveness or coarseness'.⁴¹

The child should pray regularly from the age of ten, but is not accountable until they are *baaligh* (mature).

The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alaihi wasallam) said,

“The pen (i.e. accountability) is lifted from three persons: The insane whose mind is overcome until he recovers, the sleeper until he awakes and the child until he attains puberty” (Abu Dawud narrated it in his *Sunan*)

The term 'lifting of the pen' in this *hadith* is synonymous with accountability, therefore when maturity is evident in a child he/she is *mukhallaf* (accountable for his/her actions).

Maturity as understood by Allah's Messenger (salAllahu alaihi wasallam) and his *Sahaabah* is through its signs, either by the growth of pubic hair or commencement of menstruation in girls. This is considered the end of childhood, this normally occurs between the age of 10 and 14.

There should be a drip feed imparting of sex education linked to the *ahkaam* (laws) of Allah as the need arises rather than an expectation that the whole subject be broached together.

The teaching of sex education must reflect the age of the child and parents are responsible for what their children are taught. In summary, prior to the age of discernment (seven), education is linked to encouragement and should not rob children of their youth. After seven, education should focus on developing the child's duties of *salah* and *tahaarah* and how this relates to the human body. Also a child must become acquainted with the rules of modesty when dressing and entering private rooms of the house.

6. REINFORCING ISLAMIC VALUES

Parents must also play an active part in reinforcing Islamic views regarding sex education as well as ensuring their children are not taught ideas or values that contradict Islam at school. Parents cannot delegate the

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teaching of sex education to teachers and allow the formative minds of their children to be shaped in a negative way.

Parents must be aware of what their children are being taught in general, but more specifically in the area of SRE. This means being acquainted with the school's policy as well the schemes of work on SRE. In the first instance parents should influence the decision making at governor level by being a school governor and working with other parent, community and Local Authority governors to formulate a policy that meets the needs of Muslim children. If parents are unable to influence policy and teaching, they need to withdraw their children from elements of PSHEE that contravene Islamic values and provide alternatives. If they are unable to withdraw children from compulsory elements delivered in science classes, parents have a duty of care to their children to contextualise and if necessary counteract elements that confuse our children's identities. If parents choose to withdraw their children, it is necessary to provide an alternative avenue to educate them in sex education grounded in the Islamic values of morality and within the bounds of the laws of Allah. Parents need to work with *masajid* (mosques) and Islamic organisations to achieve this.

It might be possible for parents to arrange with a local mosque or madrasah for their children to receive Islamic instruction on these matters from someone more expert or knowledgeable on the subject.⁴²

If our children are being taught practices and values at odds with Islam in areas of SRE they cannot be withdrawn from, parents have a responsibility to reinforce the Islamic values at home.

Section 2: ESTABLISHING AN ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK FOR SRE

Islam has an established value system that provides a ready made framework for an alternative SRE policy. One rooted in accountability and responsibility, not personal freedom and individualism.

We present a basic skeleton framework of an Islamically based SRE policy. It is not intended that this be a comprehensive teaching tool, but it nonetheless reminds us all of the basic components that must be there if a policy is to be considered Islamic.

I. MARRIAGE: A CORNERSTONE OF FAMILY LIFE

“Among His signs is [the fact] that He has created spouses for you among yourselves so that you may dwell in tranquillity with them, and He has planted love and mercy between you; in that are signs for people who reflect.” [TMQ 30 : 21]

Family life has been aptly described as ‘the most natural unit of society’⁴³, whilst marriage in Islam is considered ‘the cornerstone of family life’⁴⁴. The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alaihi wasallam) emphasised the importance of marriage by saying,

“When a person marries, he has (by that) completed half of his faith. Let him then fear and revere Allah in regard to the remaining half”.⁴⁵

Sexual desire is not intrinsically bad; it is an innate human instinct. If it is satisfied between a husband and wife through marriage alone it is a source of mutual comfort, tranquillity and reward from Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala).

“When a person marries, he has (by that) completed half of his faith. Let him then fear and revere Allah in regard to the remaining half”.

2. SANCTITY OF MARRIAGE

Relationships outside of marriage are completely forbidden.

“And come not near to unlawful sex. Verily, it is Fahishah (immoral sin) and an evil way”. [TMQ 17:32]

The severity of bypassing the institution of marriage is further highlighted by recourse to the punishment enacted within an Islamic system of government.

“The man and the woman guilty of fornication, flog each of them with a hundred stripes and let not compassion move you in their case in the enforcement of the law of God, if you truly believe in Allah and the Last Day”. [TMQ 24: 2]

Fornication and adultery are punishable by the command of Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala) to reflect the fact they are alien to the values of Islam. They destroy family life, kinship ties, honour and chastity.

Not only is pre-marital sex outlawed so the means to it is also a sin. Therefore the existence of relationships outside of the institution of marriage is also prevented by the *ahkaam* (laws) of Allah.

Today *zina* (sexual relationship outside of marriage) is not viewed in a negative light, in society it is considered normal behaviour. As Muslims we must maintain our view of *zina* as reprehensible. In addition to this we need to transfer this negativity to our children in order that future generations of Muslims do not look upon it as normal. The Messenger of Allah (salAllahu alaihi wasallam) was not content with merely stating that *zina* is *haram* (prohibited), although he did remind the Muslims of this fact. In one vivid exchange with a youth, he questioned whether he would like someone to have unlawful sexual relations with his own family members, therefore painting a negative image of such behaviour in the young man's mind.

Imam Ahmad recorded Abu Umamah saying that a young man came to the Prophet and said,

“O Messenger of Allah! Give me permission to commit zina (unlawful sex).” The people surrounded him and rebuked him, saying, **“Stop! Stop!”** But the Prophet said, **“Come close.”** The young man came to him, and he said, **“Sit down,”** so he sat down. The Prophet said, **“Would you like it (unlawful sex) for your mother?”** He said, **“No, by Allah, may I be ransomed for you.”** The Prophet said, **“Neither do the people like it for their mothers.”** The Prophet said, **“Would you like it for your daughter?”** He said, **“No, by Allah, may I be ransomed for you.”** The Prophet said, **“Neither do the people like it for their daughters.”** The Prophet said, **“Would you like it for your sister?”** He said, **“No, by Allah, may I be ransomed for you.”** The Prophet said, **“Neither do the people like it for their sisters.”** The Prophet said, **“Would you like it for your paternal aunt?”** He said, **“No, by Allah, O Allah's Messenger! May I be ransomed for you.”** The Prophet said, **“Neither do the people like it for their paternal aunts.”** The Prophet said, **“Would you like it for your maternal aunt?”** He said, **“No, by Allah, O Allah's Messenger! May I be ransomed for you.”** The Prophet said, **“Neither do the people like it for their maternal aunts.”** Then the Prophet put his hand on him and said, **“O Allah, forgive his sin, purify his heart, and guard his chastity.”** After that the young man never paid attention to anything of that nature.⁴⁶

3. SEPARATION OF THE SEXES

The original rule for the meeting between men and women is separation, blocking the means to illicit behaviour.

“...the men and women who guard their chastity and the men and women who remember Allah much, Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward (i.e. Paradise)” [Al- Ahzab: 35]

Men and women are addressed separately in this and many other verses dealing with the *Ahkam shar'iah*.

Upon studying the rules of Islam we find that the Allah permitted men and women to interact in exceptional circumstances in which the need arises. Therefore it permitted men and women to meet for the purposes of trade,

“...the men and women who guard their chastity and the men and women who remember Allah much, Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward (i.e. Paradise)”

medical treatment etc. This is because the evidence, which allows or obliges such activities, includes the permission for them to meet together.

Separation in the private life must be complete except in the cases allowed by Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala). As for public life, separation is the norm. It is not allowed for men and women to meet in public life except for that which the Legislator allowed, obliged or recommended for women to do, and, at the same time, it requires meeting with men; whether this meeting is with separation such as in the *Masjid* or with mixing such as in Hajj and trading.

Even in the areas in which Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala) has permitted interaction, men and women still need to be careful in maintaining a formal relationship that does not veer away from the basis for the allowed meeting. Teaching this rule is particularly important for our children who are encouraged to establish 'friendships' with members of the opposite sex. Popular culture and societal norms encourage such unrestricted relationships leading to immense harm to society and unproductive relations between the sexes.

4. HAYAA (MODESTY)

Modesty (*hayaa*) should characterise our children's interaction with the opposite sex. Parents should target modesty as a principle element of relations for older children.

As mentioned previously, much of the material used in SRE lessons are more often than not lurid and base. This is built upon an incorrect assumption that speaking at the level of the child is synonymous with using the language of the street, even if the prevalent speech is littered with explicit terminology.

Zayd ibn Talha ibn Rukana narrated that Allah's Messenger (SalAllahu alaihi wasallam) said, **"Every religion has a distinctive quality, and the distinctive quality of Islam is modesty."** (al-Bayhaqi, Ibn Majah and in Malik's Muwatta)

"Every religion has a distinctive quality, and the distinctive quality of Islam is modesty."

Anas ibn Malik narrated that Allah's Messenger (SalAllahu alaihi wasallam) said, **"Coarse talk does not come into anything without disgracing it, and modesty does not come into anything without adorning it."** (Tirmidhi)

Imran bin Hussain narrated that Allah's Messenger (SalAllahu alaihi wasallam) said, **"Modesty brings nothing but good. Modesty is part of Faith and Faith is in Paradise. But obscenity is part of hardness of the heart and hardness of the heart is in hell."** [Ahmad, Tirmidhi]

Both the content and style of what is taught must reflect the fundamental principle of *hayaa*' (modesty) and the age of the child.

5. BODILY CHANGES

A good way of broaching the subject of the body in children is to discuss the concept of personal hygiene in Islam.

The Prophet Muhammad (salAllahu alayhi wasalam) said;

Five practices are characteristic of the fitra (the natural state, or tradition of the prophets): circumcision, shaving the pubic hair, cutting the moustache short, clipping the nails, and removing the hair of the armpits. [Sahih al-Bukhari]

Children should be taught that armpit and pubic hair should be removed before puberty as a form of *ibadah* (worship).

Menstruation should be discussed with girls before it occurs.

The first time a girl menstruates is a special event in her life. It means that she has reached puberty and is officially a young woman. From that moment on, she is responsible for her religious obligations just like any Muslim woman, such as fasting, praying and covering in front of strangers.⁴⁷

By linking bodily changes to the Islamic rituals, a natural and more effective way can be found to communicate important areas of sex education.

6. HUMAN REPRODUCTION

The sexual relationship between men and women can be explained from two perspectives. Firstly, as a result of an instinct Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala) has placed in human beings and secondly, as a scientific process the Qur'an has elucidated.

In an age where marriage is seen as an old fashioned institution, our children must be taught to consider marriage as the only possible way of satisfying an instinct Allah (subhanahu wa ta'aala) has placed within us,

When a young man and woman are ready for the responsibilities of family life, they look for a suitable marriage partner. The husband and wife want to spend their lives together, help each other and have a family together. Allah has created love between men and women, and given them a natural desire to be close to each other and have children. This desire is important and good, because it ensures that new families will be established and more children will be born.⁴⁸

The process of human reproduction must not be shied away from with older children, a detailed description of human reproduction is presented in the Qur'an,

“(God) fashioned you in (different) stages.” (TMQ 71:14)

“(God) fashioned man from a small quantity (of sperm).” (TMQ 16:4)

“Was (man) not a small quantity of sperm which has been poured out? After that he was something which clings; then God fashioned him in due proportion?” (TMQ 75:37-38)

“Then We placed (man) as a small quantity (of sperm) in a safe lodging firmly established.” (TMQ 23:13)

“We cause whom We will to rest in the womb for an appointed term.” (TMQ 22:5)

These verses together with the amazing quality of the *Qur'an* to explain it should be the first basis by which an older child comes across the ideas of reproduction. This frames the learning of this subject within an atmosphere of *taqwa* (god consciousness) and makes the subject a natural one.

Summary:

- Unless parents deliver or facilitate Islamically framed Sex Education to their children, they will access harmful information from the playground, TV and mass media.
- We must transform this area of life from a taboo subject to one that is addressed responsibly so that our children are nurtured with Islamic values.
- Parents must build a close, loving bond with their children and foster an open atmosphere where their questions can be answered in a way their age and maturity allows.
- Parents must raise their children with a clear values framework that emphasises marriage as a cornerstone of family life, rejects values such as personal freedom and the resultant actions such as relations outside of marriage and homosexuality as a lifestyle choice.
- We must build within our children a love of conforming to the Ahkaam shariah (laws of Allah) in their lives.

Case Study: Homosexuality in Schools

All the information gathered below has been gained as a result of speaking to parents and through a Freedom of Information disclosure response by the school and local authority.

Every year for the past five years, February has been marked as LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender) Month. This is recognised nationally and as a result many local authorities get involved and encourage schools to do so as well.

On 23rd January 2009, parents with children at George Tomlinson School in Leytonstone, north-east London were informed by newsletter their children would be engaged in a week of activities as part of LGBT month. When the school realised there were serious concerns about the teaching of homosexuality by parents, the following week's newsletter informed parents there would be a meeting for parents to raise concerns and view the materials they would be using.

At the meeting parents believe their concerned were not only unacknowledged but they were treated with derision and a lack of courtesy. Prior to the meeting, parents had gathered together a petition with over 50 signatures signed by fellow parents. To which the head's response was to accuse the organisers of intimidating parents to sign it. The chair of governors signed a letter to signatories, drafted by a VTE&S employee, a consultancy supporting schools in the borough with LGBT activities, through training and other practical support. The chair of governors refers to bullying as the primary reason for activities during LGBT week. He reiterated that all the material used is age appropriate and faith sensitive. The response fails to deal with parental concerns about the use of books such as 'King and King and 'Tango Makes Three'.

Over the next week, parents continued to engage with the chair of governors despite the single-minded decision to run with LGBT week activities. During this time the chairman of the local mosque approached the school to convey parental disquiet that their children will have to sit through a week of LGBT activities. The head uses his visit to claim in the next newsletter the mosque's support of LGBT week at the school. The chairman tries to contact the school through phone messages and a letter, to date a response has not been received and a public correction of this inaccuracy has not been forthcoming. The mosque's official position has been to advise parents to withdraw their children from these classes. In the end, despite being aware that a penalty may result, up to 30 parents withdrew their children from all or part of the week's activities.

The response of Waltham Forest council to local press enquiries was:

“At George Tomlinson, parents were invited to meet with teachers and governors several weeks ago to discuss what work would be taking place throughout the national LGBT History Month, and how this work would be delivered. Regrettably, some parents chose to remove their children from school. The council does not condone any unauthorised absence from school and action has been taken.”

The emails and letters we have reveal the following:

- 1) Parents were 'informed' four weeks prior to LGBT week in the school newsletter. One of those weeks was taken up by half term, so parents had three weeks to discuss their concerns with the school. The council statement is misleading as it suggests the week was planned many weeks in advance. Parents were invited to 'view the materials' two weeks prior to the commencement of the week. This did not give enough time concerns to be aired and considered and there was no opportunity for consultation.
- 2) The governing body were not involved in the decision to be part of LGBT week. The response of the school is this was never discussed at governing body level. It is our contention that this should have been discussed at governing body level.

- 3) The head and chair of governors claim this is the second year in which the school has participated in LGBT week. This information does not exist in previous newsletters. Either this is because parents were not informed the previous year or it never happened. A clarification of this confusion has been requested from the school.
- 4) The chair of governors had decided no penalty charges should be issued against parents that chose to withdraw their children. Yet the local authority through its ambiguous statement to the Waltham Forest Guardian that 'action has been taken', allowed speculation of financial penalty or court action hang in the air. The Executive Director of Children and Young People's services asked the school to send a letter to the parents informing them their child's absence would be noted as 'unauthorised'. The head's response was she was being asked to make an exception which contravened an agreed process, as no standard letter for this situation existed. She argued parents could rightly claim discrimination if she wrote such a letter. Therefore no letter was sent.
- 5) Throughout this process, besides the chair and vice-chair of the governing body, the rest of the governing body were not involved in decision making at any level, they were not informed of the controversy in the school until the Daily Mail published the story. The governing body should have been made aware of what was happening so as to provide input in what was a divisive and controversial issue in the school. In reality they should have been part of the decision-making process prior to the adoption of LGBT History Month in the school.
- 6) The school's decision to run LGBT as a cross-curriculum approach, rather than part of SRE meant that parents were prevented legally from removing their children from these lessons. During this time the parents were given mixed messages. This was exacerbated by the fact that the school sent parents alongside a letter about the approach to LGBT, the local authority adopted values framework for SRE. As LGBT was not under the umbrella of SRE it is puzzling this was sent. A clarification as to why this was sent has been requested from the school.

Parents against the teaching of the LGBT lifestyle at George Tomlinson School do not believe this issue is over. Instead they have organised themselves to keep the issue alive, whilst the school hoped this episode would be consigned to history. Over 100 parents attended a successful local event organised by parents to highlight the issues and decide on a unified strategy to fight this agenda in George Tomlinson and across the borough. Christian and Catholic parents have joined with Muslims to increase the pressure on the school and local authority and in order to get the school to respond to a request for a meeting.

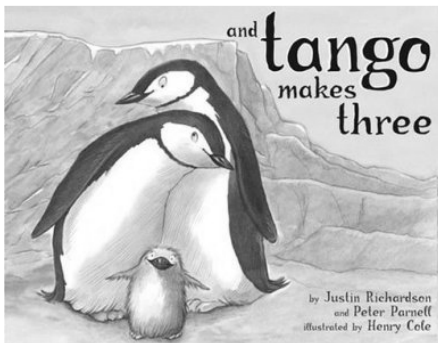
This incident highlights the case for Muslim parents and members of the community being involved in school governing bodies, they must discharge this responsibility with due diligence and make the case for parental consultation that is real and not contrived. They must act as a critical friend and be involved in setting the strategic direction of a school by setting policies and not allowing the head and Senior Management Team (SMT) to usurp their role.

A more detailed account of the findings of the Freedom of Information disclosure can be found at:

<http://sreislamic.wordpress.com>

The Promotion of Homosexuality in Your Child's School

These are a selection of storybooks that may be available in your child's school. Despite the difference in plot, the common theme is the same, to normalise homosexual relationships and family structures in your child's mind.



And Tango Makes Three

Roy and Silo are just like the other penguin couples at the zoo - they bow to each other, walk together and swim together. But Roy and Silo are a little bit different - they're both boys.

Then, one day, when Mr Gramzay the zookeeper finds them trying to hatch a stone, he realises that it may be time for Roy and Silo to become parents for real.



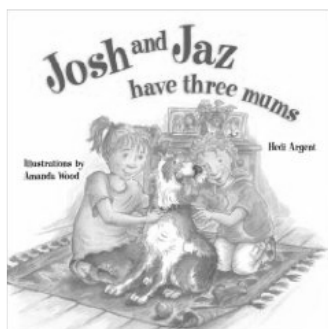
King and King

When the queen insists that the prince get married and take over as king, the search for a suitable mate does not turn out as expected. Instead of choosing a princess for marriage, the prince chooses a prince.



Spacegirl Pukes

About a young spacegirl who has two mothers and a very curious cat nearby when rocket troubles and nausea begin.



Josh and Jaz Have Three Mums

Josh and Jaz are five-year-old twins who have been adopted. They live with their two mums, Sue and Fran, and their dog Bumps. When their school teacher asks them to produce a family tree, the twins are upset and worried that everyone in their class will laugh because they live with two mums.

Sue and Fran help the children understand that every family tree will tell a different story and that life would be very boring if all families were the same.

Guidance for Parents/Governors

Although we have discussed the legal and Islamic considerations, it is clear that those tasked with formulating policies are school governors. Here are some practical action points for Muslim parents to consider when engaging with schools and for Muslim governors in designing and amending the school's SRE policy:

What to prioritise?: We have outlined some of the ideas related to SRE that fit within an Islamic framework. However, it is important to stress that when engaging with state schools one cannot implement a complete Islamic model. This does not mean we should accept a policy that tramples over basic Islamic principles. We need to outline clear non-negotiable boundaries. We believe the following are essential to building a correct SRE framework for state schools:

i) **Moral relativism** – no rights and wrongs. It is important to stress that any SRE policy that does not set out what is right and wrong is harmful and self-defeating. Children need to be taught right from wrong, this is applied throughout all disciplines in school and general life yet when SRE is taught more often than not, it is taught with moral ambiguity.

ii) **Relationships outside of marriage** – Sexual relationships outside of marriage harm society and are wrong. We must fight for the primacy of marriage as the only means to satisfying a natural instinct and encourage abstinence from sexual relationships between young adults.

iii) **SRE should be taught in single gender classes** – This allows for sensitive issues to be addressed without embarrassment and also retains modesty. The DCSF advises “Single sex groups may be particularly important for pupils who come from cultures where it is only acceptable to speak about the body in single gender groups.”

iv) **Homosexuality** – There is no law which prevents the teaching of homosexuality in schools. We must ensure that in any school policy an explicit clause exists that prevents teachers from discussing the subject.

Other practical considerations

1. Teachers training and link governors. The government's recommendations stress the importance of establishing policies that are adhered to throughout teaching in school. Teachers need to follow this policy when delivering SRE in the classroom. One of the suggested ways is to establish a subject link governor that explains the policy to teachers and then reviews the policy. This link governor also checks all written and multimedia material that is handed out.

2. Opting out and parental consultation. The government's guidelines make it clear that parents should expect to be consulted on their children's' schools SRE policy. In addition, parents can exempt children from attending SRE lessons if they find it unsuitable. Many schools do not publicise this nor do they endeavour to explain SRE to parents in general meetings with them. Where a large number of Muslim children opt-out, parents can call for alternatives for their children during school time, such as SRE lessons for Muslim students by outside institutions such as local mosques.

3. Mosque and community involvement

Government guidelines on SRE allow for organisations and individuals outside of schools to be involved in SRE planning and delivery. There is no reason why local mosques or Islamic organisations could not be approached to provide input to the development and teaching of sex education in Muslim-majority schools.

Advice and assistance

The authors of this report are happy to give advice and support to governors, teachers, institutions and parents. Please email us sreislamic@btinternet.com. An electronic copy of this report can be found at <http://sreislamic.wordpress.com/>.

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- ⁵ The guidance can be found here: <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance/sexeducation.pdf>
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- ¹¹ *ibid*, 14
- ¹² *ibid*, 16
- ¹³ *ibid*, 16
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- ¹⁶ Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (point 1.2) <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance/sexeducation.pdf>
- ¹⁷ The DfES (Department for Education and Skills) changed its name to the DCSF (Department for Children, Schools and Families) in June 2007. Despite the change in name, the circular quoted still stands as the government's guidance on SRE.
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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

SRE: Sex and Relationship Education

PSHEE: Personal, Social, Health & Economic education

DCSF: The Department for Children, Schools and Families, formerly known as DfES (Department for Education and Skills) is the government department tasked with providing guidance on SRE.

National Curriculum Science Order: This sets out the mandatory elements of SRE across all key stages. Parents are not allowed to withdraw children from the biological aspects of SRE covered by this order.

Ofsted: The Office for Standards in Education has the power to evaluate and comment on a school's SRE Policy.

Section 28: The repeal of section 28 has historically been misinterpreted as a green light to the teaching and promotion of homosexuality in schools. This did not apply to schools and since the governing body looks after the strategic direction of a school, the decision to teach or promote homosexuality is in their hands.

LA: The Local Authority plays a support role in suggesting material for teachers, but ultimate responsibility rests with school governing bodies.

Appendix

The National Curriculum Science Order details certain aspects of the biological elements of SRE at each of the key stages;

At Key Stage 1- that animals including humans, move, feed, grow, use their senses and reproduce

- to recognize and compare the main external parts of the bodies of humans
- that humans and animals can produce offspring and these grow into adults
- to recognize the similarities and differences between themselves and others and treat others with sensitivity

At Key Stage 2 – that life processes common to humans and other animals include

- Nutrition, growth and reproduction
- The main stages of the human life cycle

At Key Stage 3 - that fertilization in humans...is the fusion of a male cell and female cell

- About the physical and emotional changes that take place during adolescence
- The human reproductive system, including the menstrual cycle and fertilisation
- How the foetus develops in the uterus
- How the growth and reproduction of bacteria and the replication of viruses can affect human health

At Key Stage 4- Hormonal control in humans, including the effects of sex hormones

- Medical uses of hormones, including the control and promotion of fertility
- How sex is determined in humans

Five Practical Ways to Support Our Campaign

The determination of the government to force through compulsory SRE teaching to all children from key stage 1 onwards must be matched by our determination to ensure the values and identity of our children remain founded and nurtured on an Islamic basis. This requires us all to play our part in this campaign no matter how big or small the contribution, every effort counts towards the achievement of our objective and will be recognised by the only one that truly matters, Allah, our Creator and Sustainer.

The Messenger of Allah (SalAllahu alaihi wasallam) is reported to have said:

“Do not view any good act as insignificant, even the act of meeting your brother with a cheerful face” (Muslim).

Inspired by this hadith, we have set out five practical ways you can support this campaign. If there are other areas we have missed out, please offer your suggestions bearing in mind our objectives are two fold:

This requires us all to play our part in this campaign no matter how big or small the contribution

- To collect as many signatures in support of our campaign aims.
- To increase awareness about the implications of the government's proposals for the identity of our children.

Please look through the practical actions and decide how you are going to support this campaign.

1. **Contact your local masjid:** Ask them to support the campaign. If they have the capacity to host a seminar, encourage them to do so. Emphasise to them the importance of their role in increasing the signatories to the campaign petition. The most effective way to maximise numbers is through Jumu'ah. The key to success is a partnership in which the masjid takes ownership of the campaign.
2. **Spread the message:** Speak to friends, family members, fellow parents/governors as well as anybody that feels as strongly about this issue as you do. Encourage everyone to sign the paper as well as the online petition (the links to both are available at <http://sreislamic.wordpress.com>). Email your distribution lists, a short message you can use is available on the campaign site as a suggestion. Do you know of any avenues to either create awareness, gatherings where Muslims meet en masse, members of mosque committees, Islamic groups or educational organisations? Any forum that could move any part of this campaign on would be gratefully received.
3. **Campaign Updates:** Join the Sreislamic e-group and Facebook page (details at <http://sreislamic.wordpress.com>) to receive regular campaign updates. Encourage others to be a part of this campaign to whatever degree they are able.
4. **Volunteer:** If you feel you want to do more, please let us know. We need people to help us spread the message in a more hands-on way. If you want to join us on a Friday visit to a masjid to collect signatures or you can take a number of petitions to distribute and collect from family and friends do get in touch.
5. **Become a governor:** Governors have a huge amount of power to mould the strategic direction of a school. Whether you are a parent, community, staff or LA governor, you can get involved to improve the educational experience of all children.

JOIN THE CAMPAIGN

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Protecting the Islamic identity of our children...
one value at a time