



A Summary of Findings from theChat

TheChat was commissioned to find out how parents support their children at home when it comes to learning about friendships and relationships, growing up and puberty, being safe and topics like consent. Parents have also talked about wanting their teenage children to understand about relationships and sexual health. In our reporting we use the term *parent* to mean both *parents and carers*; this includes any family member with direct caring responsibility, as well as foster carers and kinship carers.

Conversations with parents – called ‘chats’ – and a national survey have provided insight into life at home and how parents want to support their child from the early years, through childhood and into the teenage years so that they are equipped to be healthy, happy and safe in their friendships and relationships.

TheChat has shown that parents are the primary and most important educators of their children on all these matters, but we have also taken time to talk about what parents know and think about nursery and school-based learning. In nursery or school this will be called Relationship, Sexual Health and Parenthood (RSHP) learning.

TheChat was facilitated by independent agency TASC (Scotland) on behalf of NHS Borders, NHS Grampian, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde, NHS Tayside and NHS Eileanan Siar (Western Isles) and Glasgow City Council.

[For more read the chapter About theChat](#)

Key findings

1. Parents and children are talking and learning together at home across all the themes and topics that have been part of theChat. Parents have evidenced that they are their child’s primary and most important educator on these matters. Most parents, in most themes and topics explored, fulfil their role with confidence.

2. Parents have asked for support which includes information on what is age-appropriate learning. They have requested guidance on how to respond to questions, they would appreciate book suggestions and online resources to explore with their child.
3. A key concern for parents is keeping their child safe online. Parents want access to information that helps them to understand the online/digital world and what they can do to protect their child.
4. Most parents are content with most nursery and school-based learning.
5. While some nurseries and schools communicate well with parents about RSHP learning, others less so. Nurseries and primary schools are better at communicating with parents than are secondary schools. Most parents want to know more.
6. Parents want to know more about the training that supports nursery and school practitioners and teachers to deliver RSHP learning. They want to know that practitioners and teachers are confident and competent.
7. Parents can have concerns when resources for school-based learning are offered in broad stages, rather than as learning material for a specific age or year group. There are concerns about some topics being introduced too early. Parents have talked about wanting learning to be age appropriate and of the need to ensure children are ready to learn about topics.
8. Parents of children with additional support needs want to know more about learning in mainstream and ASN settings, and seek reassurance that their child can participate, comprehend and learn as their peers do.
9. The religious beliefs of a parent will guide how they fulfil their role as their child's primary and most important educator, and this will include how they talk and learn about the topics of interest to theChat. It also informs opinions about school-based learning.
10. While all girls and boys have a right to learning about all the themes and topics that have been part of theChat, parents have questioned the approach of teaching and learning on all RSHP topics in mixed sex groups.

11. When children are absent from school – as they were during the pandemic, or because of non-attendance now – parents are concerned that children have lost/will lose out on learning as part of the health and wellbeing curriculum, including RSHP learning.
12. Trust has been lost between some parents and schools when it comes to RSHP learning. But most parents do continue to trust the NHS and their child's school as good sources for information and support.

Now for more in terms of a summary of key chapters that make up our reporting on theChat

At 18

In small group chats parents talked about what they want their child to know, understand and be able to do so that in their adult relationships they are equipped to ensure they make good choices and understand that their relationships and sexual health should mean being healthy, happy and safe. Parents have different views on how these positive aspirations can be achieved – some prefer this learning to be done at home, some at school, and most as a home and school partnership – but in the sometimes muddled and tense debate about aspects of learning about relationships and sexual health it may be helpful to remember the common ground; that all parents want the best for their children.

[For more read: At 18](#)

The following terms are used when reporting on the results of theChat national survey. *Almost all* means over 90% of parents who responded. *Most* means 75% to 90% of parents who responded. *A majority* means 50% to 74% of parents who responded. *Less than half* means 15% to 49% of parents who responded. *Few* means less than 15% of parents who responded.

Learning with 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds

Almost all parents of children in the early years have told us that they are talking and learning at home - and doing so confidently - when it comes to the themes and topics raised in *theChat*. This includes talking and learning about families and friendships, about feelings and asking for help, that we are all individual and unique

and the importance of kindness. *Almost all* parents are also supporting their child to learn about their body and that their body belongs to them (the idea of bodily autonomy), about keeping clean, about where living things come from, and who looks after them. Parents feel that that these topics are important for children to learn about. A topic of conversation in small group chats has been that parents can have different approaches to the names they use for private parts of the body, but generally there is agreement with nursery and school to use correct terms rather than euphemisms.

When it comes to learning at nursery or school *almost all* parents are happy with this learning. In a couple of aspects of learning parents could be further supported or reassured, so although a *majority* remain happy there can be concerns about the words nursery/school will use with children for private parts of the body and how children learn about pregnancy and looking after a baby. Nurseries and schools could address some concerns with improved communication and clarification about the content of learning.

At this age parents want their child to be safe, to feel safe, and to learn to build relationships through play. Navigating these experiences can be more complex when a parent is supporting a child with additional support needs.

[For more read: Parents of 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds](#)

Learning with 6-, 7- and 8-year-olds

Almost all parents and children are talking and learning at home - and doing so confidently - when it comes to the themes and topics raised in *theChat*. This includes talking and learning about families - children become more aware of diversity of families - about the adults who love and care for them, and about helping children learn who they can go to with questions or worries. Similarly, *almost all* are talking and learning with confidence about friendships and relationships and introducing chats about topics like kindness and consent. *Most* parents and children are learning together about growing up and the changes that will come soon with puberty; this can include learning about the idea of bodily autonomy ('my body belongs to me') and privacy. Likewise, *most* parents and children are talking and learning about respect and equality, encouraging children to see themselves as unique individuals not limited by stereotypes, and learning that some people have a disability, that some people are lesbian, gay or bisexual. Fewer, but still a *majority* of parents and children, are talking and learning at home about how life begins, pregnancy and birth – even if they are not doing so as yet parents acknowledge the likelihood of questions when there is a pregnancy at home or in

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the family. Children are increasingly curious, and *most* parents feel confident to have conversations when they feel the time is right.

When it comes to school, across many parts of school learning (*for example*: learning about the life cycle of plants and animals, that parts of the body are private, managing fall outs with friends, learning about feelings) *almost all* parents are happy with learning. In other areas (*for example*: names for parts of the body, consent, being safe and happy online) *most* parents are happy with learning. In a small number of areas (learning that some people are lesbian gay or bisexual, about how human life begins, pregnancy and birth) while a *majority* remain happy, some concerns may be eased by improved home/school communication and clarification about the content of learning.

At this age parents are increasingly aware of the importance of deciding when talking or learning about a topic is appropriate for *their* child. This can be influenced by their child's age – acknowledging that 6-, 7- and 8-year-olds can be quite different – and by their feelings about their child's readiness to explore a particular topic. Some parents feel it is right to talk about impending puberty, others want to wait until physical or emotional changes are more evident. Parents have talked about early learning about topics like consent or respect for others, all as building blocks for teenage and adult relationships. A child's additional support needs/disability, or a parent's faith will influence learning at home. At this age parents and children do a lot of talking and learning that builds on day-to-day experiences, parents want to protect their child, keep learning positive in tone, and to support their child to develop resilience when it comes to friendships.

[For more read: Parents of 6-, 7- and 8-year-olds](#)

Learning with 9- to 12-year-olds

Almost all parents and children are talking and learning at home - and doing so with confidence - when it comes to themes and topics raised in *theChat*. This includes talking and learning about growing up and the physical and emotional changes that come with puberty, there are conversations about body image. Similarly, *almost all* are talking and learning with confidence about a range of topics connected to the idea of equality – that each child is unique, about respect and that everyone should have a fair and equal life.

Most parents and children are talking and learning together about making and having friends, about sex-based stereotypes and they are having early discussion about loving relationships. Learning at home also addresses the theme of being

safe – both in in-person situations and online. This can include early learning about consent, about understanding abuse and knowing who children can go to for help and support. Keeping their child safe, while supporting friendships and relationships is a focus for parents of children with additional support needs/disability.

Finally, when it comes to talking and learning at home, *most* parents feel that the topics *sex, conception, pregnancy, birth and being a parent* are important topics to learn about at this age, and again *most* would feel confident in doing so, but fewer (still a *majority* of parents and children) are actually talking and learning about these topics at the moment.

At this age parents report that learning at home is impacted increasingly by learning at school. With regard to school-based learning, across many topics (*for example*: friendships, emotional wellbeing, equality for boys and girls, fairness and kindness, being online, personal hygiene) *almost all* parents are happy with learning. In other areas (*for example*: how human life begins, pregnancy and birth, puberty, menstruation, stereotypes, consent, understanding feelings, what abuse is) *most* parents are happy with learning. In a small number of areas (planning and preventing pregnancy, being attracted to someone, how people have sex, what transgender means) while a *majority* remain happy, some concerns may be eased by improved home/school communication and clarification about the content of learning.

At this age parents are increasingly aware of the importance of deciding when talking or learning about a topic is appropriate for *their* child. This can be about their child's age – acknowledging that 9 to 12-year-olds can be quite different - and about their feeling about their child's readiness to explore a particular topic. At this age parents are aware of their child becoming more independent, including online. Friendships play an increasingly important role in their world. Parents want their child to develop skills and resilience but want to protect them too. Parent and child conversations and learning are led more now by the child's questions, and by influences from the world outside the family home. A child's additional support needs/disability, or a parent's faith will influence learning at home.

[For more read: Parents of 9- to 12-year-olds](#)

Learning with 12- to 18-year-olds

Almost all parents and children are talking and learning at home - and doing so with confidence - when it comes to themes and topics raised in *theChat*. This includes talking and learning about relationships – from making relationships work, to being respectful and kind, and thinking about loving relationships and being attracted to others. Similarly, *almost all* are continuing to talk and learn with confidence about puberty, physical and emotional changes, and about menstruation (periods) and about emotional wellbeing (feelings, looking after themselves and others and body image).

Most parents and children are talking and learning together about aspects of being safe – this will include being safe in real and virtual spaces and talking and learning about consent, pornography and what makes a healthy/safe relationship. *Most* are also learning together about aspects of equality, including stereotypes, equal rights for women and men, sexual harassment/gender-based violence and the rights of people who are LGBT.

There are several themes explored where there is a gap between the importance parents have given to a topic, and the likelihood that parents and children are talking together at home. When it comes to parents and children talking and learning about what sexual activity is, what the law says including the age of consent and the pressures young people can face, while *almost all* parents identify this as an important group of topics to learn about fewer are currently talking and learning together. Similarly, for topics connected to sexual health (contraception, condoms, STIs, finding services) while *almost all* parents see this as a set of important topics fewer are currently talking and learning at home. And again, for learning around being a parent – how to prepare for parenthood, what babies need and how a baby changes a parent's life – while *most* think this is an important topic, fewer are currently talking and learning at home.

When it comes to learning at school, across many topics (*for example*: puberty and menstruation, friendships, emotional wellbeing, the influence of drugs and alcohol) *almost all* parents are happy with learning. In other areas (*for example*: consent, social media, sending and sharing messages, what sexual activity is, pressures and age of consent, equality and rights for women, contraception, preparing for parenthood) *most* parents are happy with learning. In a small number of areas (pleasure, masturbation, abortion, how people talk about gender and the rights of transgender people) while a *majority* remain happy, some concerns may be eased by improved home/school communication and clarification about the content of learning.

At this age parents remain aware of the importance of the need to decide what feels appropriate for *their* child. This can be about their child's age – acknowledging that 12 to 18-year-olds can be quite different - and also about their feeling about their child's readiness to explore a particular topic. This readiness is influenced by external factors that may not be within the control of parents, particularly online experiences and what young people hear from peers. Consent and pornography are major concerns for parents of teenage children. Parents want to understand their child's activity online and protect them from harm.

[For more read: Parents of 12- to 18-year-olds](#)

Influences on what and when parents speak to their child

There are many and overlapping influences that inform what and when learning happens at home. Parents may need to respond to what children hear from others, or to a question or worry. Learning can also arise from what children see or hear online or via different media – increasingly so as children reach the teenage years. Parents can also choose to start conversations when they feel it is the right time, or their child is at the right age. When children are learning at school this can prompt further need for conversation at home – this can be planned if parents are aware, or in response to something their child shares if parents have not been informed in advance.

For more read:

[Parents of 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds](#)

[Parents of 6-, 7- and 8-year-olds](#)

[Parents of 9- to 12-year-olds](#)

[Parents of 12- to 18-year-olds](#)

School communication about RSHP learning

Half of parents of children in nursery or primary school say their child's school is good at informing them about RSHP learning, and that they know enough. This falls to little over 1 in 4 parents of secondary school age young people. Parents get information from a range of sources other than directly from school – from children, from other parents or social media. Parents of secondary school age pupils are least likely to report any information from any source. A *majority* of parents want school to tell them more about this learning.

[For more read: Supporting Parents and Carers](#)

Support for parents

Parents would welcome advice and information on what a child should be learning about and by what age, alongside examples on what to say when their child has a question. Parents would like ideas about books or online material that they could share or read to support learning at home. A trusted online space that presents the information and materials a parent needs would help. When an incident or situation concerning their child is worrying, parents would like information on what to do and some would like a named person to contact. While fewer parents would like opportunities to meet with other parents, this is of interest to some, especially parents of younger children. There is a particular interest for parents in being able to find and use information that helps them to understand the online/digital world and what they can do to protect their child.

[For more read: Supporting Parents and Carers](#)

Providing information, advice and resources for parents

The NHS is seen as the most trustworthy source with regard to meeting parents' support needs, with trust expressed by 80%+ of parents. This is followed by their child's school – although still a *majority* of parents there is less trust in secondary schools in this regard.

[For more read: Supporting Parents and Carers](#)

Parents of children with additional support needs (ASN)/disability

Parents want to see better training and support for teachers and practitioners when it comes to understanding how additional support needs (ASN)/disability affects friendships and relationships and learning about all the topics of interest to *theChat*. Experiences and needs are explored across chapters, brought together in the Spotlight Issues paper on this topic.

[For more read: Spotlight Issue: Children and young people with ASN](#)

The importance of our Spotlight Issues series

The purpose of the Spotlight Issues series is to highlight themes or topics which have arisen as part of parental contributions. While these themes and topics are reported across chapters, these short papers highlight key aspects for further reflection.

[For more read: Spotlight Issues series](#)

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