

Submission on Sexual health and Relationship Education

About LGBT Ireland

LGBT Ireland is a national charitable organisation working to improve the visibility, inclusion and rights of LGBT people living in Ireland. Through our telephone, online and face to face services we provide confidential support and information to thousands of LGBT+ people and their family members each year.

Informed by the issues and experiences raised through our frontline services, we also provide training and advocacy support to ensure that LGBT people's voices are heard in policy and practice developments which effect that lives.

Contacts to our support services in relation to RSE:

In 2017, we responded to 1,957 contacts to our helpline and instant messaging support services, while over 63,000 people visited our website www.lgbt.ie for support and information. The majority of contacts (79%) to our instant messaging service were from young LGBT+ people under the age of 25 years, while 55% were under the age of 18 years.

For these young people their experiences in school plays a fundamental part in whether they can accept and express their LGBT+ identity. Lack of visibility, isolation and homophobic and transphobic bullying within school, continues to be problems faced by many of the young people who contact us.

We also support parents and family members of LGBT+ people. Last year a number of contacts from parents, related to concerns regarding the lack of visibility and inclusion of LGBT identities and relationships in the RSE programme being delivered in their schools. These parents noted frustration and concern about the negative impact this was having on their children's overall self-esteem and belonging.

Alongside concerns regarding the emotional impact of the lack of visibility of LGBT identities in the RSE curriculum, we would also have major concerns regarding the impact this is having on the sexual health of young LGBT+ people. In our services, we frequently talk to young people who have very limited or no understanding of risks associated with unprotected sex and of safer sex practices.

With the rates of HIV and other STIs continuing to rise in Ireland, we need to educate young people properly so that they can stay healthy. In 2016, 508 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in Ireland, with sex between men the predominant route of HIV transmission accounting for just over half of diagnoses (51%).¹

¹ <http://www.hivireland.ie/hiv/hiv-in-ireland/>

Recommendations

We would recommend that the review of the RSE education programme consider the following:

- The new curriculum should equip young people with knowledge to assist them to make healthy and respectful choices about their bodies and relationships. The curriculum needs to be inclusive and informative of all types of romantic relationships, sexual orientation, gender identity and safer sex practices.
- Schools and teachers need to be equipped to teach the revised curriculum to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to provide accurate relationship and sex education which is inclusive and embracing of LGBT+ identities.
- It is imperative that the religious ethos of a school cannot influence the content or implementation of sex education.