

# UNDERSTANDING RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES IN RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION, RSE AND HEALTH EDUCATION

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## 1. PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This document is intended to support school staff working with families to increase engagement in Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), Health Education and Sex Education. School staff may feel insecure when preparing for conversations with parents and carers about RSE due to a lack of knowledge about the different possible viewpoints parents might hold.

This document is intended to raise awareness of various cultural and religious perspectives, so that staff can broaden their understanding before engaging in conversations with parents.

This document does not tell staff what every parent will think. Each family will have their own views which may or may not correlate with the 'headline' teachings of their religion.

Whatever the issue, it is impossible to make a blanket statement which reflects the views of all families in a particular group. Direct engagement with each family is the one reliable way to assess what each family thinks. A direct conversation has the added benefit of providing opportunities for broadening or challenging perceptions and increasing the likelihood that decisions are well informed.

### **THIS DOCUMENT CANNOT SUBSTITUTE FOR MEANINGFUL DISCUSSIONS WITH INDIVIDUAL FAMILIES. EVERY FAMILY WILL HAVE VARYING VIEWS.**

In September 2020, there will be change to statutory curriculum linked to these topics. From Sept 2020, Relationships Education and Health Education will become statutory in all primary schools (maintained, academies and independent). **Sex Education remains a recommended part of the primary curriculum, but the content of this is to be decided by each school.** In secondary schools, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education will become statutory. Parents may withdraw their children from elements of RSE deemed by the school to be 'Sex Education'.

In the new guidance, there is a duty for schools to communicate with parents about RSE and to listen to their views.

In Primary schools, Relationships Education will include learning about:

- Families and people who care for me
- Caring friendships
- Respectful relationships
- Online relationships
- Being safe

In Secondary schools Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) will include learning about:

- Families
- Respectful relationships including friendships
- Online and media
- Being safe
- Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health

Health Education in both primary and secondary schools will include learning about:

- Mental wellbeing
- Internet safety and harms
- Physical health and fitness
- Healthy eating
- Drugs alcohol and tobacco

- Health and prevention
- Basic first aid
- Changing adolescent body

Alongside these newly statutory areas of the curriculum, there is existing statutory content in the National Curriculum for science.

This legislation has the capacity to make discussions with families clearer. Discussions with parents around the key issues of personal safety and preparation for puberty will be with a view to increasing parental awareness and engagement. At Primary level, only on issues directly linked to human sexual intercourse can parents of primary aged children decide that they would like to withdraw their child. Each secondary schools will define 'sex education' and having shared their definition with parents, parents have the right to withdraw from the elements included.

Once a young person reaches 15 years old, they may opt back into 'Sex Education'.

## 2. CONTEXTS- RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL GROUPS IN THE UK

When considering the views you may hear when talking to parents you should be aware that views change gradually between generations. This adjustment is not necessarily linear. Current parents may have different views to their own parents on subjects such as contraception, abortion, choice of marriage partners, sex before marriage, same sex relationships and different expectations for boys and girls.

### 2.1 BUDDHISM

Buddhism is a growing way of thinking in the UK. Some people might describe themselves as exclusively Buddhist, whilst others maintain belief in another religion and adopt some Buddhist ways. There is no leading organisation in British Buddhism which speaks for Buddhists as a whole. Many different organisations exist. Buddhism arose as a result of Siddhartha Gautama's quest for Enlightenment in around the 6th Century BC and Buddhists base many of their views in the teaching of Siddhartha Gautama.

There is no belief in a personal God. It is not centred on the relationship between humanity and God. Buddhists believe that nothing is fixed or permanent - change is always possible. The path to Enlightenment is through the practice and development of morality, meditation and wisdom. Buddhists can worship at home, at a temple, or both.

### 2.2 CHRISTIANITY

The Church of England view is that schools should ensure that their RSE curriculum protects, informs and nurtures all pupils. It should clearly differentiate between factual teaching (biology, medicine, the law, marriage, different types of families and the composition of society) and moral teaching about relationships and values, recognising that the distinction can be easily blurred and there needs to be discernment about the manner in which this is taught within a moral (but not moralistic) framework.

Other Evangelical Christians (often Evangelical) have a different view that; RSE, like all education, is primarily the responsibility of parents. Therefore parental authority must be maintained, such as through consultation with parents and the parental right of withdrawal from sex education. Sex education teaching and materials that ignore their interpretation of biblical standards may be seen as damaging for young people and as having long-term consequences for society as a whole. Some Evangelical Christians feel that primary school is too early for the kind of RSE provided in some schools.

### 2.3 HINDUISM

Attitudes towards RSE vary amongst members of the Hindu community. Hindu attitudes towards RSE topics have traditionally been private and reserved. However, more families are becoming more open to support and information from schools, in the light of technology and changing attitudes.

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## 2.4 HUMANISM

Humanist views on matters of sex, sexual health and family life are that it is the happiness and safety of people and their communities which is important. They believe that talking and learning about relationships and sex supports this. Humanists believe that all have a responsibility to support others to live happy and flourishing lives. Humanists think we need to use our capacity for reason and empathy in order to think about the potential consequences of our actions. Many humanists believe that the freedom to live our lives as we wish contributes to our personal happiness. Such freedom should therefore be allowed as long as our choices do not interfere with anyone else's freedom or cause them any harm.

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## 2.5 ISLAM

Parental attitudes to RSE will differ from family to family and so communication with individuals is key to furthering understanding. Some parents will offer RSE support at home by discussing with their children issues that are prevalent and relate to the Islamic perspectives.

Most mosques have madrasahs which are key to teaching Islamic values and would have dedicated time to discuss RSE suitable according to the age groups.

It is important to understand that, although there are sectarian differences (Sunni & Shia being the major ones) within Islam, the majority of Muslims will not accept sex before marriage, as marriage is seen as the place where sexual pleasure is lawfully enjoyed as the way Allah wanted.

Marriage is seen as a sacred rite of passage and can only take place between a man and a woman. Homosexuality is forbidden and teaching about same-sex relationships and sexuality will have to be given careful consideration. There is growing concern amongst families that the teaching of homosexuality will impact in the children's understanding of sexual orientation.

Age appropriate information should be discussed so that the children are able to discuss with their families.

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## 2.6 JUDAISM

Reform and Liberal Jews believe that sexual reproduction should be taught in schools as an important part of the curriculum.

Orthodox Jews do not believe that sexual reproduction should be taught in schools and is a matter for the family only.

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## 2.7 SIKHISM

Undoubtedly the Sikhism cultural landscape is changing and views which, in the past, were held by the majority are now not the majority views. In response to technology, parents may have heightened concerns about safety and access to explicit materials, which make engagement in RSE lessons important to them.

Sikhs value their faith and the importance of the family unit. Consequently anything that risks this may be received with closed minds. For some families, RSE challenges traditionally understood views. It's important to note many Sikhs think they understand their faith when in fact they understand what they have been taught about their faith. There may be misinformation. If RSE is taught in a sensitive way, many families will be positive towards it.

Sikh families are generally conservative and private, it means they are less likely to have passed on RSE information to their children. Consequently assistance with communicating RSE subjects is likely to be

welcomed providing it does not contradict scriptures. Young parents who have been born and bred in the western world are more open to education and practice and will have wider tolerances to RSE knowledge.

Whatever the issue though, it is impossible to make a blanket statement which reflects the views of all Sikh families. Direct engagement with each family is the one reliable way to assess what each family thinks. A direct conversation has the added benefit of providing opportunities for broadening or challenging perceptions and increasing the likelihood that decisions are well informed.

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## 2.8 TRAVELLER (GRT)

Undoubtedly the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller cultural landscape is changing and views which, in the past, were held by the majority are now minority views. In response to technology, parents may have heightened concerns about safety and access to explicit materials, which may make engagement in RSE lessons more likely. Current parents may have different views to their own parents on subjects such as contraception, choice of marriage partners, sex before marriage and different expectations for boys and girls.

Whatever the issue though, it is impossible to make a blanket statement which reflects the views of all GRT families. Direct engagement with each family is the one reliable way to assess what each family thinks. A direct conversation has the added benefit of providing opportunities for broadening or challenging perceptions and increasing the likelihood that decisions are well informed.

Historically, the concerns of GRT parents about 'Sex Education' have led some to withdraw their children from all or parts of their education. All children and a young people have a right to education and therefore schools have a duty to alleviate parental concerns about 'Sex Education' through meaningful discussion and where necessary to compromise.

Some aspects of GRT culture MAY affect parental attitudes to RSE. These attitudes will differ from family to family and so communication with individuals is key to furthering understanding.

### 3. PERSPECTIVES ON RELATIONSHIPS, FAMILIES, MARRIAGE AND SEX

Each of the perspectives below have been collated from the views of members of each religious or cultural group. These representatives, in the main, are part of the Cambridgeshire SACRE (Standing Advisory Committee on Religious Education). Other opinions have been gathered from community members. In some cases, scriptural references are provided to support statements. These should be treated as illustrative, whilst it must be recognised that in many religious communities the same scriptures are interpreted in different ways. The omission of a response to a question does not indicate a particular community holds no view, just that no specific answer was offered by the contributing community members.

This document does not reflect every possible view held by the members of different religious and cultural groups. It is hoped that middle road has been chosen through different views, with the views of particular denominations or groups illustrated where appropriate.

If you have any views on the content, please do get in touch via [pshe@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:pshe@cambridgeshire.gov.uk)

#### 3.1 BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVES

##### ABORTION

###### **When does life begin?**

Most Buddhists believe in reincarnation and this belief has a direct impact on Buddhists' views on abortion. Buddhists believe that human life begins at the moment of conception, at which point consciousness enters the womb, and therefore abortion would be seen as an act of killing, going against Buddhist precepts.

###### **Who has the greater right to life: the foetus or the woman?**

Most Buddhists believe that the most ethical thing to do, if a pregnancy caused a risk to the life of the mother, would be to allow an abortion, if it was needed to save the life of the mother.

###### **Is abortion prohibited?**

Buddhists have no written law on abortion and emphasises personal choice and conscience.

##### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Buddha did not write down any rules on married life. Buddhist views on marriage are very liberal. In Buddhism, marriage is regarded entirely as personal and individual concern, and not as a religious duty. There are no religious laws in Buddhism compelling a person to be married, to remain single or to lead a life of total chastity. It is not laid down anywhere that Buddhists must produce children or regulate the number of children that they produce. Buddhism allows each individual the freedom to decide for themselves all the issues pertaining to marriage. Knowing the frailties of human nature, the Buddha did advise His followers to refrain from committing adultery or sexual misconduct.

###### **Is divorce acceptable?**

Most religious groups see divorce as something to be avoided, but that it may be necessary for the wellbeing of those concerned.

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## CONTRACEPTION

### **What are attitudes towards contraception?**

Most Buddhists believe that conception occurs when an egg is fertilised, so contraception that prevents fertilisation is not ordinarily a problem. Emergency contraception may be unacceptable because it could prevent a fertilised egg from implanting in the uterus. However, as Buddhism is open to personal interpretation and deep consideration of the ethics of all actions, attitudes to this and other questions of birth control will vary.

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## SEXUAL PLEASURE

### **Is masturbation prohibited or discouraged?**

In Buddhism, masturbation is a serious offence for monks and nuns. Most Buddhists can agree with contemporary medical opinion that masturbation is a normal expression of sexual drive and is physically and psychologically harmless, as long as it does not become a preoccupation or a substitute for sexual relationships with others. Guilt and self-disgust about masturbating are seen as more harmful than masturbation itself.

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## NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING

### **What moves are being made to increase awareness of safeguarding children and young people?**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a priority for all religious groups. Many will have recently reviewed safeguarding guidance and many have designated people responsible for safeguarding.

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## SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are the attitudes towards same-sex marriage?**

Buddhism does not make a distinction between same-sex and opposite-sex relationships. Instead, the expectation is not to harm, exploit or manipulate others, which would directly violate the third precept. The third Precept states that Buddhists should not engage in sexual misconduct. This might include adultery as being unfaithful to a partner can cause suffering, and promiscuity, which can be seen as a negative expression of craving sexual stimulation.

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## SEX AND SEXUAL HEALTH

### **What are attitudes to sex for pleasure, rather than reproduction?**

Buddhists try to conduct themselves in a way that will not cause or suffering to others and try to always be caring and loving. The Five Precepts are important for Buddhists when considering their attitude to sex. The third Precept states that Buddhists should not engage in sexual misconduct. This might include adultery, as being unfaithful to a partner can cause suffering, and promiscuity, which can be seen as a negative expression of craving sexual stimulation. Sex should form part of a stable, loving relationship (e.g. marriage). Buddhists are encouraged to enjoy sex responsibly, as a result, most Buddhists avoid being promiscuous. Chastity is not a requirement of leading a Buddhist life.

## 3.2 CHRISTIAN PERSEPECTIVES

### ABORTION

#### Is abortion murder?

Christians and Jews have the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' which may be interpreted as being a prohibition of abortion.

#### Is abortion prohibited?

Christian denominations have different views on abortion. For Roman Catholics, Jehovah Witnesses and Evangelical Christians abortion is wrong and they are totally opposed to it even if the woman's life is at risk. Other Christian organisations such as the Church of England believe that abortion in some cases can be justified as a 'necessary evil'. To Christians such as Methodists and Quakers it is left to the individual's conscience and is acceptable if the health of the woman is at risk.

### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Most Christians believe marriage is an important part of life. They believe the purpose of marriage is to unite with someone they love for the rest of their lives, to be faithful and make this sacrament with God's blessing and in God's presence and to have children who can also be part of the Christian faith. Christians believe that marriage is a covenant before God. Marriage takes place in the presence of family and friends who act as witnesses. This shows that a couple are committed to each other. There are different Christian attitudes towards cohabitation. Some Christians believe they do not need to get married to show their love for each other and cohabitation is therefore acceptable. Some Christians (e.g. Church of England) accept cohabitation if it will lead on to marriage, while still advocating marriage as the ideal. Some Christians (eg Roman Catholic) do not accept cohabitation as they believe sex should only happen in marriage

#### Is divorce acceptable?

Most religious groups see divorce as something to be avoided, but that it may be necessary for the wellbeing of those concerned.

### CONTRACEPTION

#### What are attitudes towards contraception?

Christian denominations have different views on contraception. Many Roman Catholics believe that contraception is 'intrinsically evil'. They believe that no physical barrier should be used to stop conception. Effective family planning is seen as having a reliable knowledge of the cycle of female fertility and a willingness to abstain from sexual union when a woman is most fertile. Within Christian organisations such as the Church of England, Quakers, Methodists and Baptists all forms of contraception are acceptable and are not seen as going against God's purpose. Jehovah Witnesses believe that it is a couple's choice whether to have a family or not so none abortive forms of contraception are acceptable.

### GENDER

#### How are trans people viewed?

Some Christian denominations do not recognize gender transition. Most conclude that gender reassignment surgery could be morally acceptable in certain extreme cases, but that in all cases trans people cannot validly marry. Christian organisations, such as the Quakers, believe that it is the right of all to explore their own



expressions, non-conformity and identity in matters of gender and sexuality and note that this may involve clarity, decisiveness, doubt and re-thinking in any individual's life. Quakers have committed to providing places of worship and communities that are welcoming of all on that journey of self-exploration. The Church of England recognises the need that they should welcome trans people into their congregations, stating that 'The Church of England welcomes and encourages the unconditional affirmation of trans people, equally with all people, within the body of Christ, and rejoices in the diversity of that body into which all Christians have been baptized by one Spirit.'

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## SEXUAL PLEASURE

### **How is sexuality (seeing yourself as a sexual being) viewed?**

Christians teach that sexual relationships are important, and that sex is a gift from God and not something to be taken lightly.

### **Is masturbation prohibited or discouraged?**

In most Christian organisations the act of masturbation it is not seen as a sin, but any lustful and adulterous thoughts generated are seen as sinful. Nowhere in the Bible is masturbation explicitly forbidden. Masturbation as part of sexual relations between married partners would not be classified as sin. But masturbation outside of marital relations commonly is seen as sinful, being often accompanied by sinful, lustful thoughts, such as when viewing pornography. Though Jehovah Witnesses believe masturbation is wrong, in fact, they will often refer to it as 'self-abuse'. They view it as an unclean practice, displaying 'greediness', which leads to sexual promiscuity.

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## NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING

### **Are there concepts of privacy which affect the use of terms for body parts?**

Most Christian organisations agree that all pupils should know the correct names of the body parts as part of a well-planned educational programme.

### **What moves are being made to increase awareness of safeguarding children and young people?**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a priority for all religious groups. Many will have recently reviewed safeguarding guidance and many have designated people responsible for safeguarding.

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## SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are the attitudes towards same-sex marriage?**

Many Christians in the Church of England do not regard homosexuality as a sin. However the CofE regards sex outside the confines of marriage as being sinful. The Church defines marriage as being between a man and a woman, although it supports civil partnerships for same-sex couples. The law prevents ministers from the Church of England from carrying out same-sex marriages. The Church does not allow its clergy to enter into sexually active relationships outside of marriage. Many members of the Church of England support civil partnerships, but believe it is different to a religious marriage between a man and a woman.

### **Is sex with a person of the same sex considered sinful?**

Some Roman Catholic and Evangelical Christians who believe they are homosexual will not express these feelings sexually as they believe these sex acts are sinful. Most Roman Catholics do not believe that homosexual feelings are a sin, but they do believe that the homosexual sex act is sinful. They do not agree with

civil partnerships. The Quaker movement accept same sex relationships and marriage, as the happiness of the persons involved are more important than their sexuality.

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## SEX AND SEXUAL HEALTH

### **What are attitudes to sex for pleasure, rather than reproduction?**

Christians teach that sexual relationships are important, and that sex is a gift from God and not something to be taken lightly. Therefore, Christians believe that sex should only take place within marriage, as it is a safe and stable environment in which a couple can share the whole of themselves with each other. The Roman Catholic belief is that when a man and woman connect to each other in a sexual way, it is the most intimate physical expression of their total union. For this reason, the Roman Catholic Church teaches that this union is sacred and is a key element in marriage. Most Christians accept the teaching that sexual relationships should only happen in marriage. This is supported by one of the Ten Commandments in Exodus: Thou shalt not commit adultery. Christians believe that this commandment shows that God wants people to exercise sexual fidelity within marriage and chastity before marriage.

### 3.3 HINDU PERSPECTIVES

#### ABORTION

##### **When does life begin?**

Hindus believe that life begins at the moment of conception.

##### **Is abortion murder?**

In Hinduism, abortion tends to be disapproved of as Hindus believe that both physical and spiritual life enter the human embryo at the moment of conception. To Hindus all life is sacred. However, in keeping with the diversity within the Hindu faith there are varying views on the subject of abortion and to many Hindus it is an accepted part of modern life.

#### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

##### **What are the features of marriage and family life?**

For many Hindus having a family, marrying and becoming a parent is the second ashrama and is seen by some Hindus as a duty. Many Hindus believe that sharing wisdom with grandchildren and guiding them through rites of passage is part of the third ashrama. Everyone is expected to show respect for elders, which many Hindus put into practice by caring for and housing older relatives. Traditionally, many Hindus live in extended families. This is a cultural and financial arrangement and not a religious requirement. Many Hindus see marriage as a life-long, sacred ceremony that binds a man and woman together. It takes the Hindu couple into the second ashrama and is believed by many to be the right situation in which to have children. Marriage is also viewed by many Hindus as the right place in which to enjoy sexual pleasure, which is allowed as part of the life aim of kama. Many Hindu deities are portrayed as having partners and children. Cohabitation is not really considered by Hindus, because having sex or children before marriage is largely socially unacceptable, as are same-sex relationships. Cohabitation is, however, becoming increasingly common amongst young Hindus living in the West. (However, not all relationships in Hindu scriptures are conventional; in the Mahabharata, Draupadi is married to all five Pandava princes.)

##### **Is divorce acceptable?**

Most religious groups see divorce as something to be avoided, but that it may be necessary for the wellbeing of those concerned.

#### CONTRACEPTION

##### **What are attitudes towards contraception?**

In Hinduism, all forms of contraception are permitted. Arguments for family planning can be found in Hindu scriptures and epic stories such as the Mahabharata although many Hindus see it as their duty to have a family. As the eldest son traditionally takes part in Hindu funeral rites, some Hindus will decide not to use contraception until they have had a son.

#### GENDER

##### **How is 'gender' understood?**

In **Hinduism**, The role of men and women in the family is a difficult issue for three main reasons:

- people interpret religious teachings in different ways
- sacred texts give conflicting teachings

- social and cultural traditions may be confused with religious practice.

Some Hindus would say that the focus on atman (soul) in Hindu teaching means that gender should not even feature in how we view people, because only bodies have a gender, an atman does not.

### **Are specific roles or behaviours expected of males and females?**

In many Hindu communities, the social and cultural traditions, like most other societies around the world, tend to favour men over women. Some Hindus have worked very hard to bring about equality for women where it does not exist. The ideals of the roles of men and women for many Hindus come from deities such as Rama and Sita.

## SEXUAL PLEASURE

### **Is masturbation prohibited or discouraged?**

There is a general agreement that the Hindu scriptures are silent on the topic of masturbation. However, spiritual principles derived from those scriptures have been used to criticize masturbation. It is against the prescription of its various religious sects, yogic traditions and its traditional medicine too. It is often discouraged, as the right ways to attain sexual pleasures are well defined and masturbation gains the least importance. The Hindu treatise on sex, the Kama Sutra, does not condemn masturbation at all, but explains the process in detail. It suggests that masturbation and sexual pleasure are part of Kama, one of the four goals of life.

## NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING

### **What moves are being made to increase awareness of safeguarding children and young people?**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a priority for all religious groups. Many will have recently reviewed safeguarding guidance and many have designated people responsible for safeguarding.

## SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are the attitudes towards same-sex marriage?**

For some Hindus, same-sex relationships are largely socially unacceptable. Hindu attitudes towards civil partnerships and same-sex marriages vary. Some people view same-sex relationships as an acceptable aspect of human love and welcome the opportunity for couples to make a legal commitment to each other. They may argue that the issue of having children is no different for same-sex couples as for infertile heterosexual couples, with the favoured option of many being adoption. Some Hindus are against same-sex relationships having similar status to heterosexual relationships because they believe the parentage of children is important and the 'norm' is for people to marry someone of the opposite sex.

## SEX AND SEXUAL HEALTH

### **What are attitudes to sex for pleasure, rather than reproduction?**

Hindus see sex as one of the most beautiful and legitimate pleasures on earth, but only within marriage. Sex before marriage is discouraged and stigmatized, and extramarital sex is prohibited. However, some Hindus believe that sex is a distraction from the pursuit of Moksha, or liberation from suffering.

### 3.4 HUMANIST PERSPECTIVES

#### ABORTION

##### **Who has the greater right to life: the foetus or the woman?**

Humanists use reason, empathy, and respect for the dignity of each person when considering complex moral issues such as abortion. In thinking about abortion, a humanist would consider the evidence, the probable consequences, and the rights and wishes of everyone involved, trying to find the kindest course of action or the one that would do the least harm.

##### **Is abortion prohibited?**

Humanists believe that rational thought should direct actions and choices. Abortion is not considered wrong in principle.

#### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Many Humanists celebrate the rich variety of modern family life and the choices and possibilities now open to people. Some people think that the traditional nuclear family is best, but the traditional nuclear family does not work for everyone. Humanists believe that people should be free to build the kind of family that suits them.

##### **What are the features of marriage and family life?**

Humanists believe people need the love and support of other people, particularly family and friends, to help in life. For many people, their closest relationships are found within the family, however 'family' is defined. Families exist for mutual support, companionship, and the welfare of children or other dependents. People need close, loving and stable relationships which are important for the lengthy process of bringing up children. Everyone has a responsibility to take care of each other. The adults in a family should do their best to make responsible choices, and to avoid injustice and cruelty (such as treating different children unequally, or being violent towards other members of the family).

##### **Is divorce acceptable?**

Most Humanists would like to see married couples try to work through any problems in their relationship. However, because humanists believe human beings should consider the consequences of their actions and aim to minimise suffering, many see divorce as acceptable if it reduces overall unhappiness. They accept that people can make mistakes or that circumstances can change. They also believe that divorcees should not be denied the right to marry again should they wish to do so.

#### FORMING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

##### **What are attitudes towards forming intimate relationships?**

Many Humanists approve of the idea of marriage; many others believe that marriage is not necessarily an essential part of a good relationship. They therefore also approve of cohabitation (unmarried couples living together). Cohabitation can be an opportunity to see if we are really compatible with the person before we decide to commit further, perhaps through marriage or having children together. A couple should not, however, feel forced to get married if it is not something they wish to do. People should be free to make mutually agreeable decisions about how they wish to live their lives without interference or pressure from others. Nor should the state make life harder for unmarried couples.

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## GENDER

### **Are specific roles or behaviours expected of males and females?**

Humanists believe that women should not have restricted roles imposed on them, but neither should they feel they have to do everything. Men, too, should have the choice of staying at home and looking after children if that is what they want. Decisions about the division of labour in any couple should be the result of discussion between both people. Both people should enjoy an equal status in a relationship: it must be a cooperative venture.

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## SEXUAL PLEASURE

### **How is sexuality (seeing yourself as a sexual being) viewed?**

Many Humanists believe that sex is a pleasure that can be enjoyed responsibly. As long as people are physically and mentally mature enough to make the decision, and are fully aware of the consequences and risks, then it can be a positive ingredient of a happy life. Most humanists believe there is no particular moral virtue in preserving one's virginity until marriage, although they recognise that people should not rush into sex until they feel ready. Many see nothing wrong with having sex with more than one person during their life time. People are, however, responsible for their own decisions and their consequences, and so should make sure they always consider choices carefully.

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## NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING

### **What moves are being made to increase awareness of safeguarding children and young people?**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a priority for all religious groups. Many will have recently reviewed safeguarding guidance and many have designated people responsible for safeguarding.

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## SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are the attitudes towards same-sex marriage?**

Humanists do not construct their views based on tradition, sacred texts, or figures of authority, and so do not see anything wrong with same-sex marriages as they cause nobody any harm. They consider it unfair to deny same-sex couples the benefits of marriages: firstly the tax advantages and inheritance rights, but also the recognition that their relationships are just as loving and valid as those between couples of the opposite sex. They believe that denying this would be a form of unfair discrimination.

### 3.5 ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVES

#### ABORTION

##### **When does life begin?**

Most Muslim jurists agree that the soul enters the foetus at 120 days (4months) pregnancy. This is the process of 'ensoulment' and from then the person is 'viable'.

##### **Who has the greater right to life: the foetus or the woman?**

Most Muslims would agree that if the woman's life is in danger or if, by continuing a pregnancy, it will cause difficulty to her which is not normally bearable, then abortion may be an option. In this case it is permitted to abort the foetus as long as the soul has not entered into it (at 4 months); after the entering of the soul, it is not permissible. The above ruling demonstrates that the woman has a greater right to life than the foetus.

##### **Is abortion murder?**

Muslims believe life is sacred and can only be given and taken by Allah. *'It is Allah who gives life, then gives death; then HE will gather you together for the Day of Judgement...'* (Quran, 45:26).

##### **Does the foetus have a soul?**

Most Muslim jurists agree that the soul enters the foetus at 120 days pregnancy and that abortion following this is more sinful than earlier abortions. (40 days as a 'seed', 40 days as a 'clot of blood' and 40 days as a 'morsel of flesh'.) *'Whosoever has spared the life of a soul, it is as though he has spared the life of all people. Whosoever has killed a soul, it is as though he has murdered all of mankind'* (Quran, 5:32)

##### **Is abortion prohibited?**

Abortion is not permitted if Muslim parents are afraid of not being able to take care of their child due to poverty. *'Kill not your offspring for fear of poverty; it is we who provide for them and for you. Surely, killing them is a great sin'* (Quran, 17: 31). *'If the woman's life is in danger or if, by continuing a pregnancy, it will cause difficulty to her which is not normally bearable and if there is no solution but abortion, in this case it is permitted to abort the foetus as long as the soul has not entered into it; after the entering of the soul, abortion is not permissible.'* (Hakim A 1999:221) The above ruling demonstrates that abortion is the lesser of two evils and every effort is made to save the life of the mother.

#### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

In Islam, marriage is a highly recommended deed. *'Marry the spouseless among you...if they are poor, God will enrich them in his bounty'* (Qur'an 24.32) Islam does not promote forced relationships and encourages a healthy sexual relationship within marriage. Forced marriage is not acceptable in Islam. All sex must be consensual.

##### **How are marriages agreed and arranged?**

In some Muslim cultures, parental influence will play a major role in the choice of a marriage partner. For some Muslim young people, they choose their marriage partner and seek parental agreement. Islam is strongly against forced marriages and upholds the right of an individual to refuse a marriage proposal if the proposed partner does not match their chosen criteria. Marriage must be consensual.

##### **What are the features of marriage and family life?**

Amongst Muslims, the wedding ceremony will differ culturally, however most would still have the couple taking their wedding declaration 'Nikaah' in front of witnesses. The recitation of the Nikaah validates the

marriage. In Islam, the most important requirement is that neither the groom nor the bride should have been forced to enter the marriage. The groom gives a gift known as 'Mahr' to the bride, which is agreed upon before the Nikaah takes place. Both of them may agree to draw up a marriage contract that would have details of what they are expecting from each other. This helps in the event of a breakdown in the marriage. A celebratory feast (walimah) is arranged by the families. Most Muslim couples register their marriage according to the law of the land. Mosques are encouraging civil registration and some mosques do not allow the Nikaah ceremony (between man and woman) to take place in the mosque unless a registry certificate is shown. Some mosques within the UK have an appointed registrar who facilitates the registry ceremony.

### **Is divorce acceptable?**

Most religious groups see divorce as something to be avoided, but that it may be necessary for the wellbeing of those concerned.

In Islam, divorce is permitted, however it is not encouraged. There is a process of reconciliation for couples intending to get divorced. Any abuse (verbal or physical) within a marriage is not acceptable. The Islamic teaching of divorce does not force unhappy couples to stay together. The couples are offered an opportunity to find out if there is any chance of a reconciliation. If reconciliation is clearly impossible, there is no delays necessary especially if there is abuse and violence involved.

### **What rights do the partners in a marriage have?**

In Islam, both the husband and wife have rights over each other. The marriage contract should be made without any hidden agendas. The woman has a right to stipulate her own conditions in her contract that may include aspects of marriage (for example monogamy) and divorce terms which give her the right to seek divorce. The husband is seen as the provider for the family and it is his responsibility to provide for the wife and the children. The wife can support in this if she wishes, however overall responsibility lies with the man.

## CONTRACEPTION

### **What are attitudes towards contraception?**

For Muslims, the Quran does not give a direct ruling on contraception. There is flexibility in the interpretation of contraception. Different types of contraception can be used if consented to by both husband and wife. Muslims may use contraception to preserve the health of the woman or the well-being of family. Some Muslims may oppose the use of contraception by using the verse: 'Kill not your offspring for fear of poverty; it is we who provide for them and for you. Surely, killing them is a great sin' (Quran, 17: 31). However not many agree on this and see it as the text being misinterpreted. There are also cultural differences in views on family planning.

## FORMING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are attitudes towards forming intimate relationships?**

Islam does not allow cohabitation that is, living together before marriage. Any relationship that involves close intimacy takes place within a marriage (between a man and a woman). A girl and boy intending to marry may meet to get to know each other however there are no sexual or intimate actions involved.

## GENDER

### **What are the attitudes to segregation of males and females?**

In Muslim worship, every mosque would have an area for men and women to offer their prayers separately. In some mosques this area would be in the main prayer hall so women can take part within the congregational prayers. Almost all mosques would have a separate male and female hall for religious activity. Various



programmes are arranged in the mosque for both males and females. Depending on the nature of the programme segregation would take place if considered suitable for it. Some programmes would facilitate both genders to take part in it however it is thought crucial that flirting does not take place.

### **How is 'gender' understood?**

Islam considers that every individual is born with their fitrah (innate nature) which is immutable.

### **Are specific roles or behaviours expected of males and females?**

Islam encourages education of both males and females. In marriage, the male is often expected to provide for his family, although the wife may support with this. The wife often takes responsibility for domestic matters and child rearing.

### **How are trans people viewed?**

Islam encourages respect of all other as all have been made by God. *'O mankind! We created you from a single pair of male and female and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other, not that you may despise each other.'* (Qur'an 49:13)

## SEXUAL PLEASURE

### **How is sexuality (seeing yourself as a sexual being) viewed?**

Islam views sexual pleasure to be enjoyed in a marriage between a man and a woman only. Muslims are forbidden to have sex outside marriage. Sex can only take place between a man and a woman. Any other type of sexual activity is considered sinful.

### **Is masturbation prohibited or discouraged?**

In Islam masturbation is prohibited as sexual behaviours are to be kept between spouses.

### **What are the attitudes towards pornography?**

Islam forbids pornography. Pornography is seen as a transgression towards God, human beings and animals too. The act of seeking sexual gratification with the use of pornography takes away the rights of human beings, as they are seen as sexual objects in pornographic material. Any image or thing which causes arousal is forbidden. *'He (Allah) forbids indecency and evil and rebellion: He admonishes you that you might be mindful.'* (Qur'an 16:90)

## NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING

### **Are there concepts of privacy which affect the use of terms for body parts?**

Most Muslim families have a protocol for talk about sex and sexual parts and may not openly discuss this. In some families both the mother and father would take on a role of discussing puberty with their sons and daughters. For some this may be easier whilst some may find it difficult, but Muslims are encouraged to discuss with their children issues related to body parts, puberty and sex. Classes arranged in the mosques may help facilitate these discussions.

### **What moves are being made to increase awareness of safeguarding children and young people?**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a priority for all religious groups. Many will have recently reviewed safeguarding guidance and many have designated people responsible for safeguarding.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is not permitted in Islam. It is a cultural practice.

Both mosques and Madrasahs have a safeguarding document that is reviewed by a committee.

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## SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are the attitudes towards same-sex marriage?**

Islam forbids homosexuality and does not allow same sex marriage. However Muslims are told to respect each other and every human being and not to judge them. Respecting all human beings is an important value of Islam.

### **Is sex with a person of the same sex considered sinful?**

In Islam, same gender sex is seen as a grave sin. Homosexuality is condemned in the Quran. (Qur'an 7:80-81)

### **How are LGBT+ people treated?**

Islam teaches its followers to respect all human beings *'And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things we have created...'* (Qur'an17:70)

### **How are children of same sex parents treated?**

In Islam, children are seen as a gift from God through the marriage of a man and a woman. Islam encourages respect of peers irrespective of religion or faith.

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## SEX AND SEXUAL HEALTH

### **What are attitudes to sex for pleasure, rather than reproduction?**

Islam encourages sexual activities within a marriage only. It is for the couple (man and woman as Islam marriage is accepted between opposite genders only) to decide if the sexual act is for pleasure only and not intended for reproduction.

### **What are attitudes to sex outside marriage?**

Islam does not allow sex before marriage as marriage is seen as the lawful way of engaging in sexual activities. Adultery is forbidden.

### **What are the attitudes towards STIs and HIV?**

Islam promotes respect of individuals. It is important that a person with an STI or HIV declares this to another when either the man or woman is affected if they intend to marry.

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## SEXUAL REPRODUCTION

### **What are attitudes towards children knowing about sexual reproduction?**

Muslims teach their children to recognise that they have been born as a result of the marriage of their parents. Some mosques offer classes to prepare both girls and boys on puberty. Some families have a very close relationship and can discuss the nature of sexual reproduction.

### **What are attitudes towards IVF and other medically supported methods of reproduction?**

In Islam, IVF is permitted if natural conception is not possible. However, it is vital that the sperm of the husband and the egg from the wife is used. There should be no third party involved as that removes the sanctity of marriage between the husband and wife. This also helps in parentage doubt. Surrogacy is seen as a form of adultery as it involves another woman.

## 3.6 JEWISH PERSPECTIVES

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### ABORTION

#### **Who has the greater right to life: the foetus or the woman?**

Judaism is divided on this subject. Orthodox Judaism believes that abortion can only be justified to save the woman's life or to protect her from the risk of serious and permanent injury.

#### **Is abortion murder?**

Christians and Jews have the commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' which may be interpreted as being a prohibition of abortion.

#### **Is abortion prohibited?**

Liberal/Reform Judaism leaves the decision to the woman and her partner, but is clear that abortion should not be used for 'trivial reasons'.

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### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

Marriage is an important aspect of life for **Jews**. They believe the purpose of marriage is to unite with someone they love for the rest of their lives, to please God, who is witness to all marriages, to allow two souls to merge into one and form a complementary and mutually supportive partnership and to have children and raise them in accordance with the Jewish tradition. Marriage is mentioned in the Torah and in rabbinic law many times. As Jews regard the Torah and rabbinic law as an important source of authority, they believe in its guidance to marry. Many Jews believe that marriage is very important for a stable society in which children can be brought up in a secure relationship. Some believe that cohabitation does not offer this, even if the couple intend to get married later. They believe that life-long commitment is important and that it is within this kind of relationship that people should have a sexual relationship.

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### CONTRACEPTION

#### **What are attitudes towards contraception?**

In **Judaism**, most rabbinic authorities agree that women may use contraception as long as it is one of the forms that means that sexual intercourse can occur naturally and without any barrier (the contraceptive pill, for example). More liberal forms of Judaism generally permit any form of contraception for women. Traditional Jewish law, based on interpretations of the Torah and the Talmud (Jewish holy texts), state that for men, any contraceptive method, or attempts at abstinence or withdrawal (withdrawing the penis from the vagina before ejaculation) would be prohibited. However, more liberal rabbinic authorities do permit men to use condoms, particularly in situations where unprotected sex would pose significant health risks to either partner. All Jewish people are encouraged to talk to a rabbi about contraceptive choices, but a 2009 study found that although 90% of the observant, married Jewish women surveyed used contraception, only half of them consulted a rabbi about their decision.

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### GENDER

#### **How is 'gender' understood?**

Orthodox Jewish law, or halacha, recognises gender ambiguity, and has done throughout Jewish history. However, unlike the modern concept of gender identity, this ambiguity is defined according to physical presentation (or lack thereof) and primary and secondary sexual characteristics.

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## SEXUAL PLEASURE

### **Is masturbation prohibited or discouraged?**

In Orthodox Judaism, the Talmud forbids male masturbation, as it leads to unnecessary spilling of semen, or impure thoughts about women other than the man's lawful wife. This prohibition is derived from the Biblical narrative of Onan (Talmud Niddah 13a). The Talmud (ibid) likens the act to murder and idolatry.

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## NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING

### **Are there concepts of privacy which affect the use of terms for body parts?**

Most Jewish organisations agree that all pupils should know the correct names of the body parts as part of a well-planned educational programme. Ultraorthodox Jews may object and think of this as something that should be dealt with in the family.

### **What moves are being made to increase awareness of safeguarding children and young people?**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a priority for all religious groups. Many will have recently reviewed safeguarding guidance and many have designated people responsible for safeguarding.

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## SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are the attitudes towards same-sex marriage?**

Most Orthodox Jews believe homosexuality is a sin and therefore do not agree with civil partnerships or same sex marriage. They believe that marriage, in accordance with Jewish law, is a union between a male and a female. Most Liberal and some Reform Jews do not see homosexuality as a sin and support civil partnerships and same sex marriage. They believe Judaism should be modernised to reflect today's society.

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## SEX AND SEXUAL HEALTH

### **What are attitudes to sex for pleasure, rather than reproduction?**

In Judaism sex is usually associated with marriage. The Jewish community is strongly based on family values, as the early Israelites lived in tribes made up of extended family units. Orthodox Jews believe that sex should only take place within a marriage and that Jews should only marry other Jews. They would argue that this is necessary to guarantee the survival of the Jewish people as an ethnic group and Judaism as a religion. Some Reform Jews would prefer their children to marry other Jews but accept that they may nowadays choose to marry non-Jews. They may argue that the laws in the Torah were meant for the ancient Hebrews and do not necessarily apply to Jews living in a multicultural society. Jews traditionally follow the rules contained in the Torah and rabbinic law, which present sex as the basis of procreation. The biblical book of Leviticus 18: 6-23 also teaches that it is not acceptable to: have sexual relations with family members, sleep with a woman during her period of menstruation, be envious and desire the wives of other men, engage in sex with animals or engage in male homosexual relationships. Many Jews regard sex as a natural part of a loving and exclusive relationship. It is part of fulfilling God's plan and should be a shared, loving and private experience. Sex is seen as an essential and natural way of procreation according to God's command.

### 3.7 SIKH PERSPECTIVES

#### ABORTION

##### **Who has the greater right to life: the foetus or the woman?**

Sikhism allows action to save the life of the women over the foetus, even if abortion is prohibited.

##### **Is abortion murder?**

Sikhs believe in equality and dignity and therefore taking a life denies a person those values. Consequently, notwithstanding the women's rights over that of a foetus, Sikhs prohibit abortion.

##### **Does the foetus have a soul?**

Sikh scriptures do not specify when the foetus attains a soul. It is commonly accepted this happens from 90 days.

##### **Is abortion prohibited?**

Sikhism does not have written laws on abortion, but considers it an unjust killing at any stage from conception.

#### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

In Sikhism, the scriptures (The Guru Granth Sahib Ji) has a section dedicated to the marriage ceremony and the meaning of a married life. Sikhs see marriage as an essential part of life. It is seen as the joining of two souls with the Guru Granth Sahib Ji as part of a journey towards God.

##### **How are marriages agreed and arranged?**

In the Sikh community marriages are arranged by parents. This is traditional but in recent time's marriages born from love are becoming more common. Parents are likely to accept this to avoid family arguments/splits.

##### **What are the features of marriage and family life?**

On marriage, Sikh women become part of their husband's family. She is considered a new daughter in the family and is expected to honour that role i.e. support her new family. This role is more restrictive when compared to that of her husband.

##### **Is divorce acceptable?**

In the Sikh community a well matched arranged marriage results in few divorces. Where divorces do occur they are considered unacceptable, but preferential to long term unhappiness. A Sikh may only consider divorce if there is an adequate reason for example, insanity, desertion, cruelty, adultery, or a change of religion. In addition, the divorce will only be granted if the family's attempts fail to heal the relationship and reconcile the couple.

##### **What rights do the partners in a marriage have?**

In line with the scriptures, Sikh marriages are of equal souls joining in union with the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. This means a Sikh women can live with social freedom. However this is inconsistent with the concept of becoming part of her husband's family where freedoms are a little restricted.

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## CONTRACEPTION

### **What are attitudes towards contraception?**

There is no text or passage in the Sikh scriptures stating sex to be ONLY for the creation of life. The scriptures do state "Keep your mind unattached from lust, anger, greed, insistence and infatuation." Sikhism accepts the common-sense approach to family-planning and leaves it to the discretion of married couples which may include the use of contraception. Contraception is more acceptable than the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy.

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## FORMING INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

### **What are attitudes towards forming intimate relationships?**

Sikhism teaches that intimate relationships should only be formed after marriage. This is consistent with the scriptures which state 'Keep your mind unattached from lust, anger, greed, insistence and infatuation.'

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## GENDER

### **What are the attitudes to segregation of males and females?**

In Sikhism there are no rules promoting segregation of males and females. The scriptures do state 'Keep your mind unattached from lust, anger, greed, insistence and infatuation.' Voluntary segregation helps enact the scriptures. This takes place in both public and private settings and is seen as a sign of respect.

### **How is 'gender' understood?**

In Sikhism, gender is understood and fixed through biology. The scriptures refer to God as 'You are my father, You are my mother...' which makes God gender neutral.

### **Are specific roles or behaviours expected of males and females?**

In Sikh scriptures women and men are equal. Historic events have reinforced this understanding. However in practice women are seen as the homemakers whilst men are seen as the bread winners. The homemaker is the centre of a strong community. Nowadays both women and men may go to work.

### **How are trans people viewed?**

The Sikh scripture does not explicitly mention transgender identities. The universal goal of a Sikh is to have no hate or animosity to any person, regardless of factors like race, caste, colour, creed, gender or sexuality. Some Sikhs may discriminate against transgender people because of personal ignorance not because of scriptural teachings.

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## SEXUAL PLEASURE

### **How is sexuality (seeing yourself as a sexual being) viewed?**

Sikhism acknowledges humans may see themselves as sexual beings. Sikh scriptures teach us about checking ones desires. Sikh scriptures tells us 'the thirst of the mind and body cannot be quenched by worldly pleasures; these are "poisons" and so best subdued and controlled as far as possible'. This is achieved through meditation and prayer.

### **Is masturbation prohibited or discouraged?**

Sikh scriptures tell us 'the thirst of the mind and body cannot be quenched by worldly pleasures'; these are "poisons" and so best subdued and controlled as far as possible. This implies masturbation not only burns your spiritual life but fails to provide any long term satisfaction for the mind.

### **What are the attitudes towards pornography?**

Sikhism discourages pornography. It's considered as a catalyst to an unhealthy sexual desires.

## **NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING**

### **Are there concepts of privacy which affect the use of terms for body parts?**

Sikhs are often not experienced with openly talking about private body parts with family members. However, when taught they are more likely to discuss the right scientific words and phrases. They would prefer (not essential) to discuss this in same sex groups. Sikhs are opposed to circumcision and any other procedure which alters the body.

### **What moves are being made to increase awareness of safeguarding children and young people?**

Safeguarding of children and young people is a priority for all religious groups. Many will have recently reviewed safeguarding guidance and many have designated people responsible for safeguarding.

## **SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS**

### **What are the attitudes towards same-sex marriage?**

Sikh scriptures describe the marriage ceremony as the joining of two souls with the Sri Guru Granth Sahib Ji. The universal goal of a Sikh is to have no hate or animosity to any person, regardless of factors like race, caste, colour, creed, gender or sexuality. This would imply same-sex marriages are acceptable. However in practice, some Sikh communities shy away from same-sex marriages.

### **Is sex with a person of the same sex considered sinful?**

The Sikh scripture does not explicitly mention heterosexuality, homosexuality, and bisexuality. The universal goal of a Sikh is to have no hate or animosity to any person, regardless of factors like race, caste, colour, creed, gender or sexuality. Sikh communities, through personal ignorance, are likely to consider same sex relationships as sinful.

### **How are LGBT+ people treated?**

Sikhs will embrace LGBT+ people. The universal goal of a Sikh is to have no hate or animosity to any person, regardless of factors like race, caste, colour, creed, gender or sexuality. Ignorance of the scripture, and personal bigotry drives intolerance.

### **How are children of same sex parents treated?**

Sikhism does not discriminate against LGBT+ people, their children or any other child. The universal goal of a Sikh is to have no hate or animosity to any person, regardless of factors like race, caste, colour, creed, gender or sexuality. Ignorance of the scripture, and personal bigotry drives intolerance.

## **SEX AND SEXUAL HEALTH**

### **What are attitudes to sex for pleasure, rather than reproduction?**

There is no text or passage in the Sikh scriptures stating sex to be ONLY for the creation of life. The scriptures do state 'Keep your mind unattached from lust, anger, greed, insistence and infatuation' Sikhism accepts the common-sense approach to sex and leaves it to the discretion of married couples.

### **What are attitudes to sex outside marriage?**

In Sikhism the Five Ks include the kacherra which is a pair of shorts worn by Sikhs. The kacherra is considered to be a symbol of chastity. For Sikhs, sex is sacred and should be valued and protected. The Sikhs believe that because the divine spark is within each human being, the body must remain clean and perfect. In addition, Sikhs place a high value on family life and having children. As a result, both sex before and outside of marriage are forbidden.

### **What are the attitudes towards STIs and HIV?**

Sikhs are likely to be very private with all health conditions and consequently do not talk openly about them. Learning about them and preventing them is very acceptable. Discussing experiences of them is often possible during a 1-2-1 consultation with a health practitioner. Girls would often (but not essential) be accompanied by their mothers. Boys often choose to be unaccompanied.

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## SEXUAL REPRODUCTION

### **What are attitudes towards children knowing about sexual reproduction?**

Sikhs are open to children at the right age knowing about sexual reproduction. Before that age children's fiction is used.

### **What are attitudes towards IVF and other medically supported methods of reproduction?**

Most Sikhs greatly value having children. If a couple is infertile this causes suffering, so many Sikhs would support a married couple in the use of fertility treatments like IVF. However some (fewer now) Sikhs believe that all life (including embryos) is sacred because it is given by God and reject this support: it may be considered God's way of showing them that they are not meant to have children. In any case Sikh's tend to be discrete in such matters. It is common for more than one embryo to be produced by IVF, and for some to be left over when pregnancy has been achieved. Embryos can be frozen for use at a later date by the couple. Sikhs generally permit research on unused embryos because it has the potential to develop knowledge that could help humankind. Some Sikhs may believe that because surrogacy (requiring donor) treatments do not involve having sexual relations outside of marriage, they are an acceptable alternative. A similar view is held on 'three parent IVF' to correct mitochondrial diseases, preventing possible death soon after birth.



### 3.8 TRAVELLER PERSPECTIVES

#### ATTITUDES TO MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

##### **How are marriages agreed and arranged?**

In some Traveller communities (Roma or European gypsies), marriages may be arranged, but this is dependent on the experiences of the couple's parents and is rare in the UK. In GRT communities, paternal consent is often sought before a marriage goes ahead.

##### **What are the features of marriage and family life?**

Traveller women may feel that some traveller women tolerate abuse, sexual and physical, with in marriage, as they feel they have no choice. A small minority of traveller men may feel that their wife is 'their property' and as a result a small number of relationships may be non-consensual and abusive. (Of course this may be the case in any other group as well.)

#### NAMING BODY PARTS AND SAFEGUARDING

##### **Are there concepts of privacy which affect the use of terms for body parts?**

Traveller adults may prefer not to use scientific words for their anatomy. They may use other words or phrases. Health professionals report needing to consolidate understanding of anatomy, sexual and otherwise, with some. This is often prompted by supporting pregnant women or people who are ill. Adult GRT women may discuss sex, puberty or bodies with their daughters. Sisters or cousins would be more likely to talk about these things. There may be an intergenerational barrier and discussions about puberty and sex may not happen at all. Fathers may take a role in educating their sons about puberty, sex and relationships, but they may not discuss it at all. It is very unlikely that fathers would speak to their daughters, or mothers to their sons about bodies, sex or pregnancy.

#### SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

##### **How are LGBT+ people treated?**

Younger Travellers are likely to know that LGBT+ travellers exist, and may feel they are treated poorly by the community. Attitudes towards LGBT+ travellers are broadening and the community is become more aware of and accepting of LGBT+ people.

#### SEXUAL REPRODUCTION

##### **What are attitudes towards children knowing about sexual reproduction?**

In some Traveller families, children are given fictions about the origin of babies – gooseberry bushes, storks, supermarkets – in the same way that non-Traveller families often give their children fictions about Father Christmas or the Tooth Fairy. GRT families may feel strongly that these fictions should not be corrected until a child comes to an understanding themselves, in the same way that other families keep the truth about Father Christmas hidden until the child comes to understand independently. GRT families don't necessarily believe that their children do not know facts about sexual reproduction. They recognise that the facts about sexual reproduction will become more obvious as children grow up. They will see examples of it in their environment.

#### 4. WHAT CAN SCHOOLS DO?

Schools can ensure that high quality education about gender identity and stereotypes, respectful, healthy relationships and equality is provided for all pupils (boys, girls and those who identify as non-binary) through Relationships Education in Primary Schools and in areas of secondary RSE from which parents do not have a right to withdraw their children.

Schools have a statutory duty to ensure that children are able to keep themselves safe. Schools can ensure that education about personal safety and a person's right over their own body is delivered as part of the 'Being Safe' element of both primary Relationships Education and secondary RSE and Health Education (in both primary and secondary), from which parents do not have a right to withdraw their children.

Schools can listen to the views of parents about the way these statutory elements are to be delivered and offer flexibility, where possible, on groupings and session leaders, to increase comfort levels.

Schools can clarify the benefits of engaging in RSE to parents. Discussions focusing on increasing personal safety and reducing fear and worry will benefit all children, but especially children in families who may not be given extensive vocabulary to have these conversations with trusted adults in their family and who may not have the confidence to use the vocabulary to keep themselves safe.

Parents and pupils should be made aware of health services (including sexual health services) which are welcoming to all groups, including religious groups, GRT communities and LGBT+ young people. Schools should actively support the dissemination of this information.

Schools should identify existing supportive and health networks for developing awareness of RSE and work with them where possible.

#### 5. RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION, RSE AND HEALTH EDUCATION 2020

From September 2020 there will be some changes to the way RSE is delivered.

In primary schools Relationships Education and Health Education will become statutory. There will be no right for children to be excused from these lessons. Aspects of personal safety are covered in Relationships Education and puberty is covered with in Health Education. Primary schools should state in their RSE policy which elements of Sex Education (i.e. education about the act of human sexual intercourse) will be covered in their curriculum. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from what is defined as 'sex education'. Good practice would be that every parent who wished to withdraw their child from Sex Education, from any background, had a conversation about their decision with an informed member of staff (Head teacher or PSHE leader). During this conversation the member of staff should stress the benefits of the child being involved in the lessons:

- that is they will hear it straight from the teacher, not via other children
- they will avoid any social or emotional distress caused by being excluded
- they will have the opportunities to ask questions of a trusted adult

The parental right to withdraw is maintained until a child's 15<sup>th</sup> birthday. At this point the child themselves has the right to opt into Sex Education.

Parents have no right to withdraw from aspects of the National Curriculum for Science. Maintained schools must follow the national curriculum. There is no change here from the previous situation.

The statutory guidance for Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education (April 2019) also includes elements which are relevant to work with GRT families, especially relating to the Equalities Act 2010. Schools may take positive action to deal with particular disadvantages affecting a group with protected characteristics. For example, in the context of Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education, enabling GRT children to

learn in a single sex group may alleviate parental concerns and those of the young people themselves and enable them to participate in more of the learning which will enable them to keep themselves safe and develop healthier relationships.

## 6. REFERENCES AND THANKS

Big Talk Education 'Growing Up safe' Primary cards

Travellers – Attitudes to Sex and Relationships, Paveepoint 2011

LGBT Gypsies and Travellers – Our Stories [www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-9QW8wBi2c](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d-9QW8wBi2c)

Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities – Women and Equalities Committee (April 2019)

Cambridgeshire Traveller Health Team

GRT community members, Cottenham

Shirley Primary School, Cambridge

Westfield Junior School, St Ives

Members of Cambridgeshire SACRE (Standing Advisory Council on Religious Education)

Cambridgeshire RE Advisor

## SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

PSHE Service, [pshe@cambridgeshire.gov.uk](mailto:pshe@cambridgeshire.gov.uk) 01480 376256

[www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/)

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