

## **Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)**

### **A humanist perspective**

The BHA represents and supports non-religious people: members, humanists and those in the wider community who aspire to live good lives without religion or superstition. It is committed to encouraging informed and responsible choice. It therefore believes that all children are entitled to full and accurate SRE, including unbiased information on contraception, STDs, abortion, sexual orientation, and the many forms of family relationship conducive to individual fulfilment and the stability of society. Humanists have always been willing to work for the common good alongside the many representatives of religious communities who also take this position, on the basis of our shared values. However, humanists firmly oppose the intolerant and repressive attitudes to human sexuality expressed by some religious and political groups and individuals, and it is clear to us, as it is to most in education, that the choice is not between religious values and none at all – though some religious commentators will claim that it is. The BHA applies humanist values of rationality, inclusion, openness, and concern for human happiness and welfare when working out policy, and its approach to SRE evolves in response to developments in society and in the world of education.

### **A history of humanist involvement**

Humanist organisations have championed issues such as sex education and contraception for almost two centuries, and support the current humane, inclusive and rational approach of expert groups such as the Sex Education Forum, the Family Planning Association and the Brook Advisory Service. Since the mid-nineteenth century, humanist organisations have campaigned for freely available contraception, and in the twentieth century for liberalisation of the laws on abortion. Since the 1920s, humanist organisations have campaigned for gay and lesbian rights. After the Local Government Bill of 1987, the BHA opposed Section 28 and we welcomed its repeal in 2003. The BHA supports families with its Family Network for members and its provision of humanist wedding and baby naming ceremonies for non-religious people. Humanists tend to give children's rights to a good education and unbiased information a higher priority than parents' rights to impose their views on their children, and there are still many occasions when the perspectives and rights of non-religious pupils, and the right of all pupils to balanced SRE need to be supported.

### **SRE and PSHE today**

The BHA welcomed the Government's commitment to effective Sex and Relationships Education in the 1999 revised National Curriculum, with its new emphasis on relationships and helpful Guidance on the subject. We particularly welcomed the inclusive and tolerant nature of references to family life in the framework for PSHE: it is important that pupils learn that there are many different forms of family and ways to be good parents. We feel that the importance of responsible choices, fulfilling relationships, and good parenting is sufficiently stressed, and not so dogmatically or prescriptively as to alienate pupils. The Guidance was well received by experts in the field, and is encouragingly inclusive and open in its approach, stating, for example, that "All young people need to feel equipped whatever their developing sexuality." It also recommends that schools should work in partnership with parents, consulting them regularly on the content of sex and relationships education. We welcomed the 2009 decision of the government to make PSHE education, including SRE, statutory at both primary and secondary levels.

### **The BHA recommends**

The BHA claims no particular expertise or research experience in the field of SRE. Consequently, we have not always felt it necessary to become involved or to publish resources in an area where there are many experts already working and providing excellent information and resources. The BHA is a member of the National Children's Bureau's Sex Education Forum (SEF), and we recommend its work

to teachers, school managers and governors. The SEF's advice and resources are sensible, useful and based on shared values. They consult a wide range of religious groups as well as the BHA. For those particularly concerned about the values base of SRE, we recommend a resource that the BHA assisted with: *Faith, Values and Sex & Relationship Education* (NCB, 2002). The BHA continues as a member of the SEF's faith and values group. The SEF can be contacted at 8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE, or via their website [www.ncb.org.uk/sef](http://www.ncb.org.uk/sef).

Currently, our principal areas of concern in SRE are that parents should not be able to withdraw their children from it, and that the governing bodies of state funded religious schools should have no special role in developing the SRE curriculum for their school but that all schools should follow a PSHE curriculum inclusive of all children.

We also publish a briefing for teachers and students on [Family Matters](#) (pdf), which covers some of these issues.