



Policy No: SJD/YP/033	Authorised by: Davina Powell	Review Date: 13th June 2023
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SEXUAL HEALTH		

Policy Statements

SJD Homes will seek to ensure that all who engage with Children Looked After and Young People can give information confidently, safe in the knowledge that their advice is within the law. SJD Homes will complete training in this area through Local Authority Training available.

Relationships and sexuality are subjects that people often find difficult to discuss even though they are a central part of everyone's life.

"Sexuality is one of the ways we experience ourselves as female and male and how we relate to others. It includes our self-esteem; the roles we are given or take on; the way we communicate with others; our bodies – how they work and how we use them, and our relationships, including sexual relationships. It is our belief that young people have the right to experience relationships based upon mutual respect, and to be comfortable with their own sexuality and development. Children and Young People have a right, on an ongoing basis, to develop, make mistakes and learn. They are entitled to receive advice and guidance that promote good relationships and their sexual well-being.

Principles and Values

For sexuality to be a positive part of life, all children and young people need to:

- feel comfortable with themselves and their bodies.
- know how to avoid being sexually abused or exploited.
- understand what kind of sexual behaviour is okay.
- be supported and behave responsibly towards themselves and others.
- understand about roles in their lives and how these impact on relationships.
- receive information appropriate to their age, needs and sexual orientation.

So that they can safeguard themselves and enjoy good sexual health.

SJD Staff and managers aim:

- To help you actively promote good sexual health for our children and young people. Good sexual health includes avoiding sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unwanted pregnancy and making informed choices about sexual expression, orientation, and enjoyment without threat of exploitation, oppression, or abuse.
- To contribute to reducing teenage pregnancy and STI.
- To give you consistent guidance on how to work more effectively with young people in sex and relationships work or education.

To create an environment in which you feel you can talk openly, safely, and sensitively to young people

SJD Staff and Managers' Responsibilities

- To be aware of how their own personal values and belief systems affect their work with children and young people, whilst recognising that personal relationship education is not value-free.
- To be aware of the power and influence they have over children and young people and the decisions that children and young people make regarding their sexual activities. This could lead to children and young people suppressing their sexual identity. Consequently, staff and carers should ensure that information they give is non-judgmental, non-directive and does not attempt to impose their morals or preferences as to what constitutes a loving and/or sexual relationship.
- To monitor and control their own relationships with children and young people so as not to abuse their position of trust.
- To ensure that no inappropriate relationships develop and that all children and young people they work with are clear that no inappropriate relationship will develop between themselves and a child or young person being cared for.
- To respect the dignity and privacy of children and young people by discouraging intrusion into personal space, and not to tolerate sexual harassment of children, young people, staff, carers, or parents.
- To ensure children and young people have access to relevant personal relationships and sexual health information and preventative sexual health services.
- To respect children and young people's right to confidentiality within the limits set down in SJD Homes procedures. To disclose information relating to children and young people's sexuality only when this is appropriate in the interests of the children and young people or necessary for the protection of others.

SJD Staff and Managers should consider the following points when working with a range of children and young people:

- It is recognised that you may hold your own cultural, religious, and moral beliefs and while you will not be expected to alter your beliefs, you should not, however, impose those beliefs on young people. You will be expected to act always in ways that are consistent with this policy.
- It is recognised that young men and women have different needs in terms of sexual education, and this should be reflected in its delivery. In order to be sensitive to young people it may be necessary that work meets specific needs i.e., same sex groups/advice.
- It is also acknowledged that stereotypes exist. When considering personal relationships and sexual health issues therefore, you will be expected to actively challenge such stereotypes.
- Be careful not to make assumptions. If in doubt check it out! Talk to the person. It is important for staff who are not from minority backgrounds.
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- It is also acknowledged that stereotypes exist. When considering personal relationships and sexual health issues therefore, you will be expected to actively challenge such stereotypes.
- Be careful not to make assumptions. If in doubt check it out! Talk to the person. It is important for staff who are not from minority backgrounds (e.g.) based on ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, disability, etc.) to understand that minority perspectives need to be taken into account.

- To ensure that information is accessible to young people and their careers, it may be necessary to use translation, interpretation, signing and Braille services.
- Black young people, young women and lesbian, gay and bisexual young people are particularly vulnerable to sexualised verbal abuse and you need to be sensitive to young people facing such discrimination and act in a way that reduces its impact, as well as proactively considering how they will deal with this when it arises.
- Young people themselves may also use sexualised language inappropriately which carers will need to challenge.
- Sexual health/advice is not just about providing information about sex but also putting this into a context in terms of relationships, emotions, choice, and exploitation.

SJD Homes Staff and Managers need to:

- Consider their own attitudes, feelings, and prejudices towards different cultural and religious issues.
- Reflect on how racism operates in society and in institutions and how it affects the lives of looked after children and young people.
- Develop an understanding of, and strategies to combat racism and consider how to address sexuality and relationships with looked after children and young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds.
- Find out what policies and procedures exist for professionals that support anti discriminatory practice when working with looked after children and young people in your locality.

Working with children and young people with physical and sensory disabilities

The sexuality of people with physical disabilities has to be openly acknowledged and addressed, instead of being ignored. Professionals working with children and young people with physical and/or sensory impairments will need to find ways of helping young people to talk about their disability and any effect it may have on their sexual behaviour.

For most young people with a disability, the major impact on relationships and sexual activity is social and psychological rather than as a direct result of their physical disability. Lack of independence and lack of opportunity may also limit experience of relationships. The rights of the young person with a physical disability to choose their sexual identity and their relationships are fundamental.

There are a number of key issues around working with children and young people with physical disabilities. One issue that has arisen consistently is around alternative ways of expressing intimacy if "penetrative" sex is not physically possible. This requires some explicit and detailed information giving, which some professionals may find difficult.

Information about how to obtain personal help with sexual activity may also be difficult for some people to talk about. Referral and training needs must be identified here.

Working with young people with learning disabilities

Young people with learning disabilities have a different learning process and sex and relationships work may need to be highly explicit. It may also take more time than with other groups of young people and will need to be repeated to reinforce the messages.

Children and young people are less likely to make use of informal, unstructured social and sexual learning opportunities and do not pick up cues, ask questions, or acquire information from peers in the same way as their non-disabled peers. Poor language development can also make their understanding of abstract concepts such as privacy difficult.

Often sex and relationships information for young people with learning disabilities has been restricted to helping them to protect themselves from abuse and to understanding appropriate public behaviour.

It is equally important to include knowledge, skills development, and exploration of attitudes to help them make positive decisions in their lives.

Professionals need to consider the sex and relationships needs of children and young people with learning disabilities. Staff and foster carers in consultation with parents can then assess how these needs can be addressed.

A reluctance to address issues such as HIV/AIDS or sexual identity may relate to the fear of staff, parents, or carers and this needs sensitive handling by staff and managers.

Parents of young people with learning disabilities may find it particularly hard to accept that their children are sexual beings. In the past, this has restricted their access to appropriate sex and relationships information. Agreeing about the aims of sex and relationships information that recognises the young people's sexuality and their right to good quality, accurate information can be helpful.

Working with gay, lesbian, and bisexual children and young people

Homosexuality, like heterosexuality, is not just about sex and relationships. It is about people, their lives, and their place in society. Homophobia - fear of and prejudice against homosexuality - is common. Consequently, many children and young people who are gay are both verbally, emotionally, and physically bullied: there is a high rate of suicide amongst young gay men. A general climate which values diverse sexualities needs to be developed and appropriate behaviour needs to be modelled at all times by professionals and carers.

Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 that did not want homosexuality to be 'promoted as a pretended family' has been repealed.

The Children Act 1989 Guidance and Regulations Volume 4 makes specific reference to lesbian and gay young people and it is this that should guide all those working with looked after children and young people: "The needs and concerns of gay young men and women must be recognised and approached sympathetically...."

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual young people (and those who may not identify as such) from black and minority ethnic communities may need specific support.

The terms 'gay' and 'lesbian' are considered westernised concepts and may not be translated positively into other cultures and languages.

These young people may wish to explore how they can express their sexuality without abandoning their cultural and religious backgrounds. They may also need support to address the reality that, within their

communities, sexuality is such a taboo issue that they may not be able to be open about it in the way they wish.

Professionals need to demonstrate ways of accepting and valuing diversity with different sexualities and within different cultures and communities. Support and acceptance from a young person's own culture is very important: sometimes they may fear moving outside their cultural norms in case they are rejected by their own communities.

Staff and carers must ensure the safety of young people and be sensitive to their feelings about same sex relationships. Carers' personal views should not be imposed on young people and care should be taken with language and behaviour.

- in your care about sexual behaviours and attitudes.



