



# VOICES AND VIEWPOINTS

PERSPECTIVES ON

Relationships, Sex and Health Education  
from faiths and beliefs

Summer 2021



# Contents

We hope this document will support and help teachers and others involved in the education of children and young people. It does not purport to represent official denominational teaching, which can be obtained from faith organisations. Neither does it attempt to critique these. Rather, it represents a selection of personal perspectives from members of faith communities in our region, including SACRE members and others.

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# SECTION A

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND CONTEXT

### Introduction

Since September 2020 schools have been required to follow statutory guidance on teaching Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) in English schools. This can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>.

These are deeply personal areas of human life, where facts, feelings, values and experiences all intertwine. Accuracy, sensitivity and safety are all key ingredients in helping children and young people understand how to live healthy and fulfilled lives with integrity and respect.

This has always been a sensitive area and perhaps nowhere more so than at the interface between beliefs, sex and relationships. Standing Advisory Councils on RE (SACREs) are responsible for what their title says, Religious Education. They do not have a remit for RSHE and our SACREs point schools and parents to the national and local guidance provided. However, recognising the links between RSHE and beliefs, local SACREs feel this background information will inform, support and enlighten teachers and others concerned with the delivery of RSHE.

The aims are:

- To offer a range of viewpoints from people of faith about the specific areas covered in the RSHE curriculum. (Not all of these are covered at every key stage);
- To support teachers with background information, so building knowledge, sensitivity and confidence;
- To reassure parents that faith perspectives are recognised;
- To signpost appropriate sources of guidance.

Beliefs are often rooted in the authority of historic scriptures and teachings. However, these have always been interpreted in the light of contemporary insights, life and experience. In practice, therefore, there are diverse approaches within and between faith communities and they cannot usually be typecast within a convenient religious or denominational label. We have therefore tried to reflect a range of personal perspectives from within faith traditions and have not attempted to summarise 'official' teaching.

Likewise, although there is a variety of approaches represented here, there is no claim that this collection represents every belief and viewpoint. This is an anthology rather than an encyclopaedia.

It is also important to bear in mind that most traditions recognise the legitimate place of personal conscience and individual judgments.

This is very much a 'grass roots' document. The main part is devoted to the voices of nearly 40 members of faith communities as well as Humanists in our part of northern England. We have asked for and organised these responses around the main categories defined in the RSHE curriculum. This will help teachers to explore faith perspectives on specific curricular topics.

For many people of faith, particular areas have raised acute difficulties: the sanctity of life, sexual orientation, gender roles and gender identity. Four of the nine protected characteristics identified in the UK Equality Act 2010 emerge in the interface between faith and RSHE. This is therefore a challenging area and is vulnerable to genuine misunderstanding, but also to misinformation, exploitation and prejudice. The riposte to this is to listen, recognising there are genuine and different human stories. The most valuable human response is to offer what the Irish philosopher Richard Kearney has called a 'hospitality of narratives', affirming the integrity and validity of different perspectives. In this way, all can recognise diverse experiences and viewpoints as valid human insights, even if there are deep disagreements on grounds of faith or opinion.

The task is to distinguish between *disagreement* with an action or viewpoint and *disapproval* of a fellow human being, a rather more deep-seated judgment which it may not be ours to make.

# Statutory Responsibilities and Guidelines

## General Information

Statutory guidance (2019) from the Department for Education was issued under Section 80A of the Education Act 2002 and section 403 of the Education Act 1996. This can be found at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>. It replaces the Sex and Relationship Education guidance (2000) and will be reviewed 3 years from first required teaching (September 2020) and every 3 years after that point. Schools must have regard to the guidance, and where they depart from those parts of the guidance which state that they should (or should not) do something they will need to have good reasons for doing so.

Guidance on Health Education does not apply to independent schools, which must meet the Independent School Standards as set out in the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

The guidance applies to **relationships education** for all schools providing **primary education**, including all-through schools and middle schools.

It applies to **relationships and sex education** for all schools providing **secondary education**, including all-through schools and middle schools.

**Health education** applies to all maintained schools including schools with a sixth form, academies, free schools, non-maintained special schools and alternative provision, including pupil referral units. The statutory requirements do not apply to sixth form colleges, 16-19 academies or Further Education (FE) colleges<sup>7</sup>, although they are encouraged to support students by offering these subjects.

**Relationships education is compulsory in all primary schools.** Sex education is not compulsory and if a primary school chooses to teach aspects of sex education (which go beyond the national curriculum for science), the school must set this out in their policy. All schools should consult with parents on what is to be covered. Primary schools that choose to teach sex education must allow parents a right to withdraw their children.

**Relationships and sex education is compulsory in secondary schools.** Parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSHE until three terms before the child turns 16. After that point, if the child wishes to receive sex education rather than be withdrawn, the school should make arrangements to provide the child with sex education during one of those terms.

**All schools must have in place a written policy.** Schools must consult parents in developing and reviewing their policy. Schools should ensure that the policy meets the needs of pupils and parents and reflects the community they serve.

**The new curriculum has been compulsory since September 2020,** with an easement in place until the start of the summer term 2021 if schools were not ready.

## **Further documents**

- [Relationships education, relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education: FAQs - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education-faqs) This section on frequently asked questions reflects some of the concerns expressed about the new guidance and explains some of the common misconceptions around the subjects.
- [Relationships, sex and health education: guides for parents - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/relationships-sex-and-health-education-guides-for-parents) 2-page summaries of the guidance for parents (and other stakeholders) of primary and secondary age pupils. Available in Arabic, English, Somali and Urdu.
- [Teaching about relationships, sex and health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health) Information and training materials to help train teachers on relationships, sex and health education.
- [Teaching about relationships, sex and health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health) Information and training materials to help train teachers on relationships, sex and health education.

## **Religion and belief, including teaching in schools with a religious character**

A good understanding of pupils' faith backgrounds and positive relationships between the school and local faith communities will help to create a constructive context for the teaching of these subjects.

In all schools, when teaching these subjects, the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching, so that the topics that are included in the core content in this guidance are appropriately handled. Schools must ensure they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are amongst the protected characteristics (see below).

All schools may teach about faith perspectives. Schools (particularly those with a religious character) may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious. For example, the school may wish to reflect on faith teachings about certain topics as well as how their faith institutions may support people in matters of relationships and sex. However, they must also explain the legal rights afforded to people under UK law (see section on Equality Act below).



## [Equality Act 2010: advice for schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/topics/equality-act)

Schools are required to comply with relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The [public sector Equality Duty \(PSED\)](#) (s 149 of the Equality Act) requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities.

In all schools, teaching should reflect the law (including the Equality Act 2010) as it applies to relationships, so that young people clearly understand what the law allows and does not allow, and the wider legal implications of decisions they may make.

The content of the school curriculum has never been caught by discrimination law, and this Act now states explicitly that it is excluded. Excluding the content of the curriculum ensures that schools are free to include a full range of issues, ideas and materials in their syllabus, and to expose pupils to thoughts and ideas of all kinds, however challenging or controversial, without fear of legal challenge based on a protected characteristic. Schools will need to ensure that the way in which issues are taught does not subject individual pupils to discrimination.

### [Inspecting teaching of the protected characteristics in schools - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Guidance (2020) for inspectors to assess how well schools equip children to learn to live alongside and show respect for a diverse range of people.

Schools should ensure that all teaching is sensitive and age appropriate in approach and content. At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a stand-alone unit or lesson. Schools are free to determine how they do this. It is expected that all pupils will have been taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum.

Schools are at liberty to teach the tenets of any faith on the protected characteristics. For example, they may explain that same-sex relationships and gender reassignment are not permitted by a particular religion. However, if they do so, they must also explain the legal rights LGBT people have under UK law, and that this and LGBT people must be respected.

# Guidance and Sources of Support

## Local contacts

Further information and guidance can be obtained from these places:

Bradford: [EdSafeTeam@bradford.gov.uk](mailto:EdSafeTeam@bradford.gov.uk) <https://bso.bradford.gov.uk>

Calderdale:

Kirklees: [business.solutions@kirklees.gov.uk](mailto:business.solutions@kirklees.gov.uk) [rshe@wyta.co.uk](mailto:rshe@wyta.co.uk)

Leeds: [Schoolwellbeing@leeds.gov.uk](mailto:Schoolwellbeing@leeds.gov.uk)

## Other resources

The Department for Education maintains a list of suggested resources (Annex B)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/annex-b-resources-for-relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

It will also be worth looking for the formal views and policies of faith communities on their organisations' websites.

The NSPCC produces guidance on safeguarding and difficult conversations with children:

<https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/sex-relationships/healthy-relationships/>

One of the most sensitive areas for many in faith communities is LGBT+. Some Christian churches have produced guidance around homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying:

Valuing All God's Children: Guidance for Church of England schools on tackling HBT bullying

[https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Valuing%20All%20God%27s%20Children%20July%202019\\_0.pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-07/Valuing%20All%20God%27s%20Children%20July%202019_0.pdf)

Made in God's Image: challenging homophobic and biphobic bullying in Catholic schools

<https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/about-us/publications>

Other resources from faith communities are listed here:

The Wellbeing of LGBT+ pupils: a guide for Jewish Orthodox Schools

<https://chief Rabbi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/The-Wellbeing-of-LGBT-Pupils-A-Guide-for-Orthodox-Jewish-Schools.pdf>

Imaan – the UK's leading LGBTQ Muslim charity

<https://imaanlondon.wordpress.com/>

Hidayah LGBT

<https://www.hidayahlgbt.com/>

Keshet – for LGBTQ equality in Jewish life

<https://www.keshetonline.org/>

Sarbat LGBT Sikhs

<http://www.sarbat.net/resources/>

Understanding Humanism

<https://understandinghumanism.org.uk/perspectives/>

## **Establishing a Safe and Supportive Environment**

It is essential to create a safe and supportive environment in which all pupils feel safe to learn and participate. This may look different to different pupils; for some, this may just be sitting and listening and for others it may be sharing feelings, emotions and personal experiences.

RSHE lessons can touch on a number of sensitive subjects so it is important to teach each lesson as if someone in the room has a personal experience of the subject matter to try to minimise any potential distress.

Through discussions with other key staff, such as the school designated safeguarding lead and SENDco, the teacher is aware of the needs of all pupils and, where able, supports them to safely participate in the learning.

Ground rules that are agreed by the staff and pupils before the lesson begins are vital. Staff need to be clear about expectations and boundaries but pupils must participate in creating the ground rules so they are meaningful and acceptable to pupils. Teachers and other adults should always model good use of the ground rules.

Appropriate language and vocabulary, that is understood by all, should be used.

Inappropriate words, language or phrases should not be accepted and should be challenged.

Distancing techniques which depersonalise the situation under discussion are used.

Distancing helps pupils learn, and then reflect on, how the situation under discussion may apply to their own lives.

Pupils should understand the importance of anonymity, of not using names or recounting personal situations that are not their own. RSHE education is about how we manage situations, not who did what and when. If pupils do disclose information, which is a cause for concern, the school's child protection procedures should be followed.

# **The Law on Sexual Relationships and Marriage**

This is a brief summary of the salient points in 2021, applying to England.

## **Marriage**

You can get married or form a civil partnership in England or Wales if you're:

- 16 or over (with permission from parents or guardians if you are under 18)
- not already married or in a civil partnership
- not closely related

This applies to opposite sex and same sex couples.

## **Forced Marriage**

Forcing someone to marry or marrying someone who lacks the mental capacity to consent, is a crime. This applies if it happens in the UK or if someone is taken abroad for the purpose of forcing them to marry. It is different to arranged marriage, which involves adults who freely consent to marry each other and have the capacity to make that decision.

## **Domestic Abuse**

The Domestic Abuse Bill defines this as: 'physical or sexual abuse; violent or threatening behaviour; controlling or coercive behaviour; economic abuse; psychological, emotional or other abuse'. This behaviour is considered criminal regardless of whether it is a single incident or a pattern. An abuser can be a partner, former partner or relative.

## **Consent to sex**

The legal age of consent for sex is 16 for everyone. In UK Law, consent is given if a person 'agrees by choice, and has the freedom and capacity to make that choice'.

## **Contraception**

Contraception is legal and available in a wide range of forms, most of which are free of charge through the NHS. Contraception services are confidential, including for people under 16. Confidentiality can be broken only if there is a safeguarding concern.

## **Abortion**

Abortion is legal throughout the UK and is available through the NHS. After 24 weeks, abortion is allowed only if the woman's life or her physical or mental health is in serious danger, or there is a severe foetal abnormality.

## **Gay 'conversion therapy'**

The UK government has said that it intends to outlaw 'gay conversion therapy', the attempt to change sexual or gender orientation to become heterosexual or cisgender (2020).

## Voices and Viewpoints from Learners

It is self-evident that the views and feelings of learners should be paramount in the delivery of RSHE in the classroom, alongside the perspectives of parents and the skills of professionals. This means RSHE should be appropriate to the age of pupils as well as responsive to their feelings and needs. This is every bit as important in the learning environment as in the content of the curriculum.

As in other areas of school life, the contribution of 'pupil voice' offers a valuable avenue for listening and a critical insight into the views and feelings of learners.

As part of SACREs' work in this area, two local clusters and schools explored pupil voice in RSHE. Their experience may offer ideas on how this could be done.

### Junior Working Party

The Elland Primary Cluster in Calderdale convened a working party of 6 pupils over 7 years old, together with their teachers, led by the Lead Headteacher, also a member of SACRE. This may be a useful model for other schools to explore 'pupil voice' in RSHE.

It had these aims:

- To promote pupil voice and religious views across the curriculum;
- To value and utilise the viewpoints and perspectives of all children;
- To celebrate similarities, differences and diversity within communities, recognising the importance of all protected characteristics;
- To provide a useful document to support the successful delivery of holistic RSHE teaching, with a focus on reflecting 'voice' from a range of faiths and religions;
- To explore children's current understanding and experiences to aid RSHE policy development.

The group carefully explored five themes in Relationships and Health Education with the primary children and looked at a series of questions linked to each.

Families and people who care for me

- Who cares for me?
- How can we show care towards others?
- When do we need caring for the most?
- What changes happen as we grow up?
- What is marriage? Is it important to you?
- Why are families important?
- Do all families look the same?

- How might families be different to yours?

#### Caring friendships

- What is a friendship?
- What is a relationship?
- What qualities make a good friend?
- What does trust mean to you?
- Do friends always get along?
- Do families always get along?
- How do you cope with conflict, pain and fallouts?

#### Respectful relationships

- What does respect mean?
- How can you show respect to others?
- Do all people deserve to be treated with respect?
- How should we treat people who are different to ourselves?
- Is self-respect important?
- What is bullying?
- What is a stereotype?
- What types of bullying do you know?

#### Online relationships

- Who keeps us safe?
- What do you do if you feel unsafe?
- What is 'online safety'?
- What unsafe things can happen online?
- How can you show respect online?

#### Being safe

- Where is your safe space?
- Does everyone have the right to feel safe?
- We all have a right to privacy – do you agree?
- What is your understanding of permission?

#### Some more general questions were also explored:

- What makes a good RSHE lesson?
- What makes a good RE lesson?
- What has been learned so far?
- What do you remember from this teaching?
- What will make this teaching even better?
- What do you want to know in the future?

- Do we all have the same views?
- What is your understanding of your own/different faith views?
- If you could ask a trusted adult any question about RSHE, what would it be?
- Which parts of the curriculum make you feel embarrassed, upset or anxious?

In this exercise, the group mirrored cultural diversity with the children representing different faiths and backgrounds. Discussion covered a wide range of issues. Children showed a good understanding of marriage but were also sensitive to the pain raised by divorce and the consequences of broken relationships. They articulated the view families might be different, but 'it doesn't matter what families look like because the love is the same'. In discussing ways in which care can be shown, words such as 'listen', 'express', 'protect' and 'comfort' were used. There was dialogue around building respect, trust, emotions and experiences.

Parents were appreciative of the opportunity given to children, one commenting: 'Thank you for your kind words and for providing this wonderful opportunity to A. He is on top of the moon today. This experience has given a good boost to his confidence and will contribute substantially to his overall personality development. I am so impressed with the education system and the initiative to involve children's perspective in defining the future curriculum over such important topics. Thanks to all the teachers supporting this'.

Overall, the discussion provided insights into children's thinking and an opportunity for them to feed into the curriculum's content, priorities and tone. It will be an ongoing part of school life.

## Secondary Voice

As one way of gaining understanding at a secondary level, students at Newsome Academy, Huddersfield were asked for their views, asking a series of questions in a questionnaire.

These might include examples like these:

- What has been helpful in RSHE lessons and what do you think was missing?
- What helps you to learn in an RSHE lesson?
- What topics do you think you should learn about? (offer a selection to scaffold if necessary)

If you belong to a faith:

- In what topics do you think your faith might have important views?
- Do you think the views of religions should be communicated as part of the lesson on particular topics? If so, which?



- Do you feel it is important for your teacher to know what your faith believes surrounding the areas you are being taught?

Diamond Nine exercises were also used with year 10 students to consider their views on the most important topics to cover. These included: our bodies; religion and sex; abuse; sexuality; sexting; hygiene; where to go for sexual health advice.

Through further discussion, some more themes emerged, including: Sex and the Law; Consent and negotiation in relationships; Comparing different types of relationship.

Year 10 students felt that they would have liked to cover the following topics earlier in their school career, including at:

Year 7: Effects of sexism and transphobia; feelings and relationships

Year 8: Portrayal of sex in the media; consent and negotiation in relationships

Year 9: Exploitation and violent relationships; comparing different types of contraception.

As well as a questionnaire, a panel of students may be used as a Student Voice focus group.

A school *Discovery Week* focused on RSHE and views were collected from staff and student surveys. These clearly indicated next steps in planning for teaching RSHE.

## SECTION B

### VOICES AND VIEWPOINTS FROM PEOPLE OF FAITH & BELIEF

*A range of local people share their personal viewpoints on the topics covered in RSHE, from the perspective of their faith, beliefs or values. The topics are organised to match the curriculum requirements for RSHE, though these vary according to the age of the children and young people.*

#### Families and people who care for me

##### Supporting children as they grow up, including puberty

All religions and beliefs place a high priority on the care and nurture of children. There are usually ceremonies or rituals to celebrate birth and growing into adult responsibilities. Faiths also place an emphasis on the example and instruction given to children so they can grow up to be responsible and informed adults. How much parents talk about puberty and growing up is usually more a factor of culture, personality and relationships, than directly of religion.

##### Christian

My beliefs help me support children and young people to tackle the tricky issues they will face in a loving and thoughtful way. I believe in respecting others and not being judgemental and hope that my example is helpful to them.

*The main responsibility falls to the parents. It is hoped that the parents will transmit sound teaching and sufficient love as well as setting clear boundaries in line with the faith. The child should be raised to know and love God and, by the same token, should be aware that they are intensely loved by God and that their sense of worth should not rely on contingent things. Such an understanding will bolster self-worth when dealing with the challenges of getting older.*

In the gospels there is a story about Jesus welcoming small children when his disciples wanted to turn them away. He said, 'Let the children come to me and do not prevent them because God's kingdom belongs to such as these.' I believe God welcomes children and that children, no less than adults, can grow spiritually and know that God is love. Knowing you are loved can make a great difference through all the pain and joy of growing up. Part of growing up is wondering if I am 'normal' and wondering about the ways I am like other people and the ways I am different. Christians believe that all people are made in the image of God. This includes children. This means that although people are different from each-

other, their bodies and their minds are different, but everyone is made in God's image and everyone is equal.

*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints places great emphasis on the importance of family life. During puberty they should be supported by their families but the church also has an extensive education programme that we call "Seminary". Our young people between the ages of 14 - 18 are encouraged to participate in this course of study together. It is based on scripture with emphasis on how Christ's teachings can be applied in their own lives, so this would include their home, school and recreational activities. It is felt that this will give them a good start to the day before they go off to be immersed in all that the world has to offer. Dances, sports, camps and cultural events, where church standards are maintained, are also organised at a local and national level. Younger children also have learning activities that are designed to be fun and instructive.*

## **Hindu**

Supporting children whilst they are growing up is an important part of our culture, as is supporting them throughout their lives. In the past puberty was very rarely discussed as children and parents found it difficult to discuss openly; it was felt this should be left for schools. Nowadays, as times have changed, the second and third generations are quite flexible in talking about it and seem to be supporting their children in their own time by talking, raising awareness and information through education. It is seen as a part of growing up that everyone goes through as a part of their life.

*I think Hinduism helps children to accept themselves just as they are whilst they are going through puberty. I remember as a teenager, when I first started menstruation, I was readily able to tell my mum and I knew what to do, what sanitary products to use as she had shown me. In our family there was no shame around this.*

## **Humanist**

The Humanist principle of tolerance of difference is really important to me. We discuss with our children (aged 6 and 9) the diversity of identities, family make-up, gender expression etc, that are part of our world, and make it clear that all are welcome. Hopefully, this not only allows them to grow up tolerant of others, but also to explore their own identity without fear or anxiety.

*Children should be given guidance and evidence-based information to enable them to develop the skills and knowledge they need to make informed and safe choices. The emphasis is on the child's personal development and their wants and desires.*

## **Jewish**

Family life is very important in Judaism. One every doorpost in a Jewish home or building you will find a mezuzah, which is a scroll containing a prayer called the Shema. This tells us to teach the traditions of Judaism to our children. They will see the Jewish way of life every Friday and each Shabbat, which are celebrated in the home and the Synagogue. When a child is born, if she is a girl then the father will name her in the Synagogue and if he is a boy then he will be circumcised on the 8<sup>th</sup> day following his birth when he will be given his Hebrew name.

I sent my daughter to a Jewish school so that the values I follow at home could be reinforced by the school namely, keeping a kosher home and observing Shabbat and the festivals. A girl can choose whether to have a Bat mitzvah at the age of 12, which is the age when they take on the responsibility of a Jewish woman, obliging her to fast and light candles. She will undertake a course of study for a year learning the responsibilities of a Jewish woman after which she will make a presentation in the Synagogue for her family and friends. A boy will have a Bar mitzvah at the age of 13 and this is the first time he will be called up to read from the Torah in the Synagogue in front of his family and friends. This usually takes a year to prepare for. He can then form one of the quorum of 10 men necessary for certain prayers and takes on the religious obligations of a man. These ceremonies help the children through puberty as they realise the responsibilities that they have. There are also Jewish youth organisations where teenagers attend which help give them a sense of their identity, dealing with all spectrums of religious observance.

*Halacha requires us to train children from the age of understanding (typically 4-5 years old) in the laws and customs of Judaism. We tried to make the whole experience enjoyable as well as meaningful. Regarding puberty, girls from 12 and boys from 13 are required to keep the mitzvot (commandments) so the primary school years are important for making this second nature to them.*

## **Muslim**

In Islam, a nurturing and safe family environment is a very important part of a child's upbringing. It is the first building block to a child's character. This is why parents are given a high amount of responsibility and specific roles to help the young grow.

In a Muslim family, fathers are responsible for providing the economic stability and mothers are primarily responsible for being the homemaker. Both mother and father should work together to ensure the child's emotional, physical and spiritual journey through life is balanced and fulfilling.

In Islam, a child's growth and development does not begin at the moment of birth. Islam places a great deal of importance on the mother and father to invest in their own personal character and growth before the child is even conceived. The parents are advised to adopt a balanced lifestyle: diet and health habits, language acquisition, emotional and spiritual intelligence and social connections. Throughout pregnancy both parents are advised to be at their best physical, emotional and spiritual health to allow the child to have the best start to life.

The parents are fully responsible for the child and their actions until they reach puberty. It is their responsibility to ensure that the child is given a good start to life, including a good name, beneficial knowledge and skills and, most significantly, a wholesome approach to spiritual, emotional, physical, mental and general wellbeing. Muslims are taught that there should be no shyness with respect to the truth, learning and understanding. Parents are encouraged to speak to their children about puberty and other relevant topics to ensure that their child grows up with an understanding of the phases of their development.

*Relationships are built on love and respect. In many cases, it can be a little difficult to speak to parents about growing up and going through puberty but as the 2nd and 3rd generation families are more aware of the importance of having such discussions, children are more supported during this phase. I believe this responsibility lies with the parents who should discuss this with their children and promote honest and open discussions.*

## **Sikh**

Puberty is part of growing up and how God intended things to be. Culturally, it can still be a taboo to speak about the menstrual cycle or changes to the body but is different for each family. It depends on the relationships between parents and children and how willing they are to open up and talk about puberty.

*Most Gurdwaras have classes for children where the Sikh values and beliefs are taught both in English and Panjabi. Children are usually instructed in the values and virtues of the Sikh tradition and the Sikh way of life whilst growing up. This includes discussions of life cycle rites and bodily changes. Puberty is regarded as a part of nature and is taught as such. They are also encouraged to attend camps that are often organised for Sikh children and young persons, covering various aspects of the Sikh teachings. These provide them with opportunities to come together to share their experiences.*

*The welfare of children is an intrinsic part of the belief system. They should be brought up with love and care in the midst of a stable family and community environment. As part of their growing up, for instance, children are encouraged to participate in activities that take*

*place at the Gurdwara where ample opportunities exist to develop interpersonal and public performance skills. This includes partaking in musical/hymn singing performances in front of the congregation or helping to prepare and/or serve langar.*

*The unique concept of “Chardi Kala” encompasses having a positive attitude, optimism and steadfastness in the face of adversity, taking misfortunes in your stride and having a firm belief in the benevolence of the Creator. This helps provide emotional support and a mechanism to deal with challenging situations. Gripping narratives of Sikh historical events and successes in survival achieved against formidable odds helps instil a sense of pride and dignity.*

## Marriage

Marriage is held in high esteem by most religions and is seen as both a physical and spiritual lifelong union of two people in the sight of God. It is also seen as the place in which children are procreated and nurtured in family life. There are marriage ceremonies, vows and customs in all faiths, as well as secular and Humanist ones. Most religious traditions see marriage as a union of a man and a woman but others, such as Quaker, Unitarian and Liberal Judaism, also recognise and solemnise same-sex marriage.

### Buddhist

There isn't a formal marriage ceremony in Tibetan Buddhism. Buddhism is still fairly new in the west and the east/west cultural crossover is such that Buddhists in the UK still need to find their own way of expressing Buddhism. That cultural appropriation will take many decades to come.

*Marriage isn't an important part of being Buddhist. Ordained members of the community are single and celibate. Intimate relationships can be quite distracting for both the senses and your focus. For non-ordained members, there are no fixed ideas on whether you should be in a relationship or not, married or not, straight or gay. It's more about the peace of mind you can bring to relationships, rather than needing others to be a certain way in order for you to love them. This is not as easy as it sounds. We all have a tendency to want to attract the thing we want and push away the things we don't and this shows up quite strongly in our close relationships. It does however provide a great opportunity to practice loving kindness, generosity and patience, which are some of the values that we try hard to develop.*

### Christian

Marriage is a gift from God between a man and a woman. God created Adam to find fullness through Eve and it was God's intention that humans engage in procreation within the boundaries of this structure. Marriage is part of creation order and so to conform with it is to walk in step with God's design.

*Marriage is an irrevocable commitment between a man and a woman for the good of each other and for the procreation and education of children.*

Marriage is a union of two people with lifelong intent, based on mutual love and commitment. The law in this country now allows same-sex marriage as well as civil partnership. After centuries of discrimination, hiding and fear, as a Christian, I believe we should be glad that everyone can celebrate love and commitment. Some feel this undermines the 'institution of marriage'. I don't agree with this. We shouldn't be like the

elder son in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son. He resented his father's welcome to his wandering brother, even though it didn't detract from his own security.

*Marriage is covenant which is a 'Bible' word for an agreement. It has a public dimension and a private dimension which are expressed in the marriage ceremonies I conduct. In a wedding two people make promises to love each other for the whole of their lives. They make these promises to one another; these are personal but also made in the presence of other people because every married couple needs families and friends who will love and support them. Marriage is important because it provides people with confidence and security: here is someone who loves them and will be there for them whatever happens. The traditional promises say you take the other person 'for richer, for poorer, for better for worse, in sickness and in health.' Marriage provides a good environment for two people to build a deep and intimate friendship in which they can create a home where friends and are welcome and children may grow secure in their love.*

I believe marriage is important because it is a way of life designed by God. I also believe that not being married is an equally valid life choice and we should not be obsessed with the notion that being married is one of the 'achievements' of life.

*To me personally, marriage is a significant public and religious statement of partners' love and commitment to each other. Quakers have a distinct way of celebrating marriage, which is important to me. Equality of the partners is fundamental. I think the act of commitment is the important thing, not the event, especially if they are going to raise children. I have no problem with people not getting married if it's not right for them. I find flashy expensive wedding ceremonies distasteful. Quaker weddings are relatively simple affairs, in line with our testimony to simplicity. Divorce is not to be taken lightly, but better than staying in a loveless relationship.*

Marriage has a special status in Quaker practice. From the very start Friends have regarded marriage as a state so momentous that it requires an explicit, solemn enactment in a meeting for worship. Friends understand marriage to be equally available to same-sex and opposite-sex couples. We recognise marriage to be something quite distinct from simple cohabitation, no matter how loving. Marriage involves an unconditional and express commitment, not only to one another, but to the Quaker Meeting, to the community, to society, and to God: the commitment to be a couple and to stay a couple. It is a commitment so profound that it must be made in public, witnessed in meeting, and recognised by the law of the land. Those who make it must fully intend the commitment to be lifelong; marriage is not a state that should be entered into or departed from lightly.



## Hindu

Marriages are very important for the children. In marriage two people join in matrimony, live a life together, share companionship and have their own family. In Hinduism, people do not marry their own cousins or any close relatives, but they used to marry into the same caste. Nowadays, as times have moved on, there are more mixed marriages, marrying in different castes. Finding your own partners is acceptable for marriages to be successful.

*In Hinduism marriage is about families coming together as well as individuals. I think Hindus are very accepting, flexible and adaptable around people of different cultures coming together and welcoming other people coming into their culture.*

## Humanist

For me, marriage is an expression of commitment between people, usually based on love. It has important legal ramifications, but I don't believe it to be the only way people can express that commitment.

*Humanists believe in the right of people to celebrate their union in a non-religious ceremony and that this should be recognised legally. Marriage is something you should be able to do if you want to, there is no moral difference between people who get married and those who don't. Marriage is about having your union recognised in the community and legally. Humanist weddings follow no set pattern. You are able to marry where you want, when you want and how you want. A Humanist ceremony is focused on the couple, their relationship and what they value. Humanists view long-term partnerships as strongest when built upon support, equality and honesty.*

## Jewish

The Torah recognises marriage between a man and a woman. We hope our children will marry a Jewish partner so the traditions and heritage can be passed on through the children. A Jewish person is one who is born to a Jewish mother. Reform, Progressive and Liberal Jewish congregations allow same-sex marriage but Orthodox Judaism does not. People will be welcomed into an Orthodox Synagogue as individuals and that includes transgender individuals as well.

*Traditional Judaism defines marriage as the union of a biological male and a biological female. It is the context in which children are raised and parents are expected to be role models. Historically, the laws of marriage and divorce defined the financial and other obligations between husband and wife and these laws apply today.*

## Muslim

*Marriage is a relationship between two people based on love and commitment where two people come together and start a new life together. In Islam, marriage means the completion of half your faith so in Islam, the importance of marriage is always made very clear and how both partners should support one another through the good and bad times.*

Islam considers marriage as the foundation of any stable and cohesive society. The Qur'an references marriage frequently to reiterate its importance and high status. In Islam, marriage is defined as a safe space for a man and women to grow through mutual love, mercy and understanding. Through marriage, healthy family units are nurtured, and lineage is protected.

*"They are your garment and you are a garment for them" - Quran (2:187).* This verse likens a married couple to garments, where the relationship is cemented by interwoven threads of love and mercy. Marriage brings stability and a sense of security in the lives of the couple. It also provides a bedrock to the collective welfare of the society.

## Sikh

*In the Sikh religion marriage is not just a civil or social contract, it is a spiritual union between a man and a woman that encompasses and symbolises the joining together of two bodies into one light. The marriage ceremony takes place and is solemnised in the presence of the Sikh scripture Guru Granth Sahib Ji. Thus, marriage is regarded as a sacred relationship between the couple and the Creator through Guru Granth Sahib Ji.*

*Sikhs believe in a householder's way of life thereby living one's life within the family and the wider community providing unstinting service (sewa) for the wellbeing of all. This is the Sikh's way to spiritual enlightenment rather than leading the life of a hermit. Hence marriage plays an important part in this process and is encouraged. Its status is further enhanced by referring to the Sikh wedding ceremony as Anand Karaj (ceremony of bliss).*

For Sikhs, sex is sacred and should be valued and protected. 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, sex before and outside of marriage are forbidden, because sex is strictly for creating a family.

*Marriage is very important in Sikhism and all the Gurus were married and had children (except the eighth Guru, Guru Har Krishan as he himself was a child). Marriage is seen both as a union of two souls and the union of two families. Culturally, it is an expectation for a Sikh to get married and have a family. Sikhs should marry Sikhs as it is felt that non Sikhs will not accept the teachings of the Guru Granth Sahib. Some Gurdwaras allow marriage between Sikhs and non-Sikhs but this usually takes place on weekdays.*

## Different caring and stable family structures

Traditionally, the nuclear family is at the heart of family life. This is upheld in the teachings of faiths but there is also recognition that not all families conform to this ideal. This may be through circumstances or choices. Respect for other human beings and for diversity is also an obligation for believers.

### Buddhist

Caring families are very important to Buddhists. Parents and guardians lead by example; showing how meditation and simple offering practices can help children become calmer, more in control of their emotions, less grasping and more giving. From a Buddhist point of view who is providing those structures is less important, as long as they are there. For example, in Tibetan monasteries, parents of children as young as 5 or 6 would send their children many miles away to live the life of a monk or nun in a monastery. The elder monks or nuns would then become the 'parents' of these children.

*What is important is creating a loving environment in the home. One of our key motivations as Mahayana Buddhists is to be of benefit to others, so that we can help all sentient beings to achieve enlightenment. This starts with our families and friends, looking at how we can be respectful and supportive of their needs and how we can treat them with loving kindness. If we are feeling angry or frustrated, we use our own minds to understand where those emotions are coming from, acknowledge them and not push them away. They usually stem from something being not the way we want it to be, which we call attachment. If we are feeling angry or frustrated, we try not to lash out with angry words or actions as we know that just creates the likelihood for those feelings to escalate. So, a supportive loving environment can be created regardless of what your family set up is. This is true whether you are in a mixed-race extended family like me with stepchildren, or whether you are a single mum, or if you have two dads or two mums.*

### Christian

Human beings are not perfect, and no-one can be certain that they have the knowledge of what is a perfect relationship. Loving my neighbour is a central tenet of my faith and an understanding that it is not for me to judge, is central. As long as there is love within the heart of a family, I would think it wrong to condemn any structure.

*As Christ called us to love first, that is what we do. It is not the position of the church to judge and condemn alternative family structures. That does not mean that teaching changes; only that as we live in a fallen world, we should expect to encounter things that fall short of God's ideal. Through prayer and teaching, we yearn for God's Kingdom on earth.*

Sometimes Christians have been reluctant to recognise there are different kinds of families but at the heart of Christian faith is the idea that God is love. The most important thing in any family is love. When we have remembered that God is love it has helped us to encourage different kinds of families to love each other.

*In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we recognise that families may not follow the traditional pattern as circumstances change or initial relationships differ. A family may constitute a man and wife without children, a single parent with one or more children, combined step-families, grandparents looking after grandchildren, adopted and fostered children living with adults. Some of our members are part of the "Shared Lives " community and have taken into their homes vulnerable adults who need support. These people are considered to be family members also. Young people living together, such as students, may be considered a family also. A unit where both parents are the same gender would be regarded as a family to all intents and purposes but such a union would be considered unlawful in the sight of God.*

We are asked as a Quaker community to support and uphold families and children: to share the responsibility with the parents. This includes equally children of mixed race and of same sex marriages.

## **Hindu**

Hinduism recognises that there are very caring and stable families that have different structures. We respect them because of their upbringing, cultures and traditional values and we learn about their backgrounds. The faith teaches that people come from different walks of life and have their own lifestyles, values and culture.

*I have always found my own immediate and extended family and the local Hindu community to be welcoming and non-judgmental about different family structures. My grandmother was a great example to me, welcoming to all people. She always valued and cared about our happiness.*

## **Jewish**

Judaism recognises non-traditional forms of family exist but discourages them. 'Be fruitful and multiply' is the first commandment and traditional marriage is the vehicle for this.

## Humanist

Humanists recognise and support people to live the lives they want to live in consensual adult relationships however they choose, built upon support, equality and honesty, and to live a family life based on these foundations. Humanists support the right of the LGBTQ+ communities to develop family lives as they choose.

## Muslim

In Islam, a strong and healthy family unit is a prerequisite to nurturing a stable society. Islam sanctifies the relationship between a man and woman by ensuring a sense of continuity for the human race. Same sex marriages are therefore prohibited in Islam.

Diversity is part of God's design and the purpose of our diversity is to form meaningful and sustainable relationships. Islam recognises the right of people to express their own variations of family structures. Muslims are not allowed to discriminate against people based on these. However, Muslims are required to form a family structure that conforms to the Islamic ideals. *"O people! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another"* – *Qur'an (49:13)*

*In Islam, divorce is a last resort if nothing else works to improve a marriage. However, there are many marriages that will result in separation due to various reasons so it is accepted that there will be many different family structures that are equally as stable and caring as that of a typical family set up.*

## Sikh

The family, created by the marriage between a man and a woman, is regarded as an essential part of the social structure in the Sikh community. It forms a unit in which the emphasis is on working together towards self-development through Naam Simran (spiritual meditation), honest earning and sharing with the needy. Family life is encouraged by the Sikh Gurus who themselves practised it. The concept of family life in Sikhism preserves human values. It teaches to love and respect not only all members of the family but also the extended family and the society at large. It provides psychological foundation for children to have a stable and loving environment.

Whilst family structures in other communities may differ, Sikhs respect other people's way of life but would not themselves like to live differently from the values derived from their religious teachings.

*Sikhs are taught not to judge and always help others. However, it can still be hard for a divorced Sikh or single parent. Sikhism teaches to look after the elderly and to respect them. Traditionally, Sikhs would live together as an extended family and help each other.*

# Friendships and respectful relationships

## Dealing with conflict and reconciliation

Any relationship has the potential for conflict. Personal resilience and discipline can strengthen the ability to deal with difficulties in a constructive and reconciliatory way. For people of faith, concepts like forgiveness, empathy and reconciliation are key aspirations to help to resolve disagreements or conflicts.

### Buddhist

Buddha taught two fundamental principles: not to harm others; and if you can, help others. That was the theme throughout all his teachings. This includes equanimity: all beings want happiness, don't want suffering and have an equal right to happiness. Central to his teaching is that all beings have "Buddha nature" which when nurtured can lead all to full awakening, or enlightenment, regardless of age, sexual identity, race or ethnicity. Buddhists believe that we have all had beginningless past lives and will continue to have many more until full enlightenment. This may help us to grasp less at the identity we cling to right now and be more flexible to see other points of view, roles and role identities.

*For Buddhists, nothing is permanent. Everything changes, all the time, and that includes our relationships with others. People go from being friends to not liking each other, or indeed from not liking each other to being friends. We all tend to think that there is something from the other person's side that makes them likeable or not likeable. Not so, it is a matter of perception. Our minds are constantly looking for what things we are attracted to and what we want to stay clear of. Usually when we are in conflict, our mind is focussed on ourselves. We can break out of that circular thinking by putting our focus on to helping others.*

*We have some great meditation techniques in Buddhism to help us to work with difficult emotions and to expand our awareness of others. For example, in Loving Kindness meditation we start by wishing ourselves to be free from danger, to be happy, to be healthy and to live with ease. Then we gradually expand our thoughts to others, including to anyone we are having difficulty with at that time. With Tonglen meditation we imagine what might be hurtful for others and then reflect back what would be of benefit to them. With time and practice this is a very powerful way of overcoming the focus on the self.*

### Christian

Forgiveness is of paramount importance. We are called to love and forgive as Christ did through the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Understanding salvation provides perspective

and, while we get things wrong and make mistakes, nothing is beyond redemption. It is hoped that through sound teaching and through the practice of the faith, that children will be well versed in conflict resolution. Rather than being bringers of conflict, they should embody servitude and be sowers of peace.

*Because we are all made in the image of God everyone is worth respect even when they are different from me and even when they are difficult for me. Christians follow Jesus who said that we should love our enemies and pray for people who make life difficult for us. We may feel powerful emotions, so showing respect can be difficult. Reconciliation is important to Christians because we believe God sent Jesus to forgive us for all our wrongdoing and show us a way of living in which we can forgive others. Forgiveness is difficult for us because it is a kind of sacrifice that means giving up anger, selfishness, bitterness and resentment. Yet when we forgive, we find we are being set free from damaging attitudes that hurt us.*

At the heart of Jesus' teaching was loving others and forgiveness! Teaching around humility, putting others before yourself and recognising that God loves all people are real assets when resolving conflict and bringing reconciliation.

*We recognise that part of our journey here on earth will undoubtedly and necessarily involve conflict. Conflict, in all its forms, is necessary to our eternal development as we strive to overcome it, developing our character and love for our fellow beings and God as we do so. We use Christ's example of love and forgiveness as we pray, strive, be still, and receive guidance from the Holy Spirit as we endeavour to overcome conflict.*

One of the Quaker Testimonies is of Peace. This accepts that conflict exists in society but strives to resolve it through talking, listening and respect for others and their views.

## **Hindu**

Children's beliefs are supported by parents, families, friends and schools where they are able to talk to someone who they can trust and confide in. Talking about friendships and relationships to children from a very young age is very important, as is allowing them to express their feelings, emotions and any frustrations that they are feeling. The key is to be calm, and to try to resolve situations with the help of someone.

*I think my own upbringing has helped to know how to manage conflicts in friendships or relationships. I think I have the skills to be able to see different sides of the story and other people's points of view. If you understand other people, you can understand more about why they might behave the way they do. Communication and openness are keys to dealing with conflict.*



## **Humanist**

With our children, we often refer to the starting principle of 'be kind' in thoughts and actions. Demonstrating acceptance of difference also helps to avoid many conflicts in the first place.

*Conflict and disagreement are part of life and children should be given the tools to be able to reflect, to empathise and to understand how conflict, argument and disagreement occurs, how to prevent this and how to defuse conflict. Humanists believe in the golden rule of treating others in a way you would like to be treated and avoiding treating them in a way you would not like. This simple guide provides a foundation to help understand each other and see things from another's view.*

## **Jewish**

Sometimes disputes can be resolved by applying the halacha, the collective body of Jewish laws. At other times compromise is the order of the day. Children are encouraged to give way in the face of other children's stubbornness because it is more positive for character building. However, there is a fine balance and we do not want them to become victims of bullying.

## **Muslim**

In Islam, friendship and respectful relationships are very important and members of the Muslim community refer to themselves as brothers and sisters. This close-knit brotherhood and sisterhood is built on a foundation, like a house that requires a strong bedrock. This foundation is the shared faith in God, the guidance found both in the Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's code of practice.

A close-knit brotherhood and sisterhood results in friendships characterised by warmth, kindness and mercy. Friendships and all relationships in Islam should be sincere and genuine, and respectful, driven by a desire to please God in all our interactions. If there is ever any conflict, God requires believers to seek reconciliation first. The following verse speaks about the protecting nature of the believers. "The believing men and believing women are allies (protectors) of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give charity and obey God and His Messenger. God will have mercy upon them, for God is Almighty and Wise" - Quran (9:71)

Approaching friendships and general relationships in this way, makes it easier to overcome conflicts, to repair relationships and to help others reconcile their broken friendships and relationships. It ensures that both tolerance and respect for all are at the heart of all human

interactions, allowing no room for bullying. After all, to hurt others would be against the teachings of Muslims who want to please God.

*My beliefs teach me to deal with issues with patience and a calm demeanour and not to retaliate with anger. Friends are like family so we treat them all with respect. When dealing with conflict, you should always listen to each other and try and resolve the situation in a peaceful manner. Islam teaches us to respect everyone, regardless of gender, age, religion and personal beliefs.*

## **Sikh**

The “Mool Mantra” which provides the central tenets of Sikhism commences with “everything is God”, “always speak the truth”, “everything is created by God”, “have no fear”, “have no hatred”. In this context, children are encouraged to recognise the oneness of humanity and the connected nature with others. Consequently, conflict and reconciliation are as much an internal conversation as an external one. Children are taught to examine the source of conflict and understand why this might have occurred rather than hate a person. They have the opportunity at the Gurdwara where families come together to form relationships and to learn to manage conflict. Sikhs are taught to recognise the human race is one, and that godliness exists in other people too who are part of the Creator’s creation. Therefore, it is imperative to live in peace maintaining friendly relationships and find ways to resolve any conflict.

*In all relationships we should be humble, show forgiveness and try to reconcile differences. It is always right to show love and respect and to try to make amends. There is no place for resentment or hate.*

## Challenging bullying and encouraging respect for all

**There is a strong code of ethics in all faiths that demands standing up for the weak and vulnerable. This derives from a central tenet in most religions that all beings are created by God. Bullying therefore has no place. But there is also recognition that such behaviour may have roots in a lack of self-esteem or past hurts, so that changing behaviour and healing are at the heart of any response.**

### Buddhist

One of the Buddha's main teachings is on equanimity: not holding some sentient beings close and others distant. In reality, this means that as Buddhists we look to develop compassion and loving kindness for all, not just for our family and friends. The Dalai Lama often encourages us to think about the impact on the many and not just the few when we are making decisions; to think about how we can focus on helping others in a broader sense rather than focusing on helping ourselves, our family, our community and our nation. Good Ethics is one of the six perfections that we endeavour to develop as an aspiring Bodhisattva (Buddha in training)

### Christian

All are made and loved by God who knew us before we were in the womb. An assault on the person who is an act of creation, is an assault on the creator himself. This means that bullying should not feature in the Christian life. This would include hostility towards self and is regardless of any 'differences.'

*The teaching of the Church is that all peoples should be treated with equal dignity.*

Jesus' teaching was to love your neighbour. One of Jesus' parables was about the Good Samaritan who looked after someone even though they were from a 'different' culture. Jesus sat with and ate with 'tax collectors and sinners'.

### Hindu

Showing respect for all, caring and understanding other cultures, religions and values is the right way and any misunderstanding should be addressed by speaking with family, friends, relatives and schools who can support.

*A core part of Hinduism is recognising that there are always going to be differences between groups of people and individuals and we have to value all. Having respect for people, even if you might not agree with them, is also important to me. I think if you can understand why*

*someone might be bullying or aggressive it can help to challenge this. It may begin to help them see their own damaging behaviour and then be able to change this.*

Bullying takes place everywhere. Children should talk to their parents and it is parents' duty to listen to their children, help or seek support from school, community, friends and families to resolve the situation.

### **Humanist**

Children deserve to live and learn in places of safety and this should be paramount. Bullying should be dealt with quickly with the victim's rights and feelings taken into full account. Bullying comes from a lack of self-esteem in the perpetrator, so the solution longer term is to help children build up a strong self-esteem based on valuing their own worth and the worth of others. The golden rule and the development of empathy are crucial.

### **Jewish**

The Ten Commandments tell us how we should behave towards our fellow man. Our children are told that we should behave towards each other as we would want to be treated ourselves.

*Bullying is forbidden and parents and teachers must intervene to stop it. All human beings are created in the image of their Creator, and as such are deserving of respect. We encourage children to see the good points in others.*

### **Muslim**

In Islam, bullying is considered a form of abuse and a cowardly act. One should never use abusive language or a conduct that assume power and control over others. Through Islamic teaching, Muslims are encouraged to control their anger, their actions and what they say when they are irritated. *"The strong person is not one who wrestles well but the strong person is the one who controls him/herself when he or she is in a fit of rage" – Prophet Muhammad*

In the examples of Prophet Muhammad's life, there are numerous examples of how he did not respond to provocations, insults and not even to physical attack against him. Muslims are encouraged to be forgiving, show exceptional kindness and good conduct to everyone. This does not mean that bullying should be tolerated or accepted, as the implications of this form of abuse can cascade negatively onto society and future generations.

## **Sikh**

Sikhs believe that because the divine spark is within each living being, they respect all living things. They need not be intimidated by anybody nor should they threaten anyone. Sikhs are taught to stand up to injustice in whatever form this may occur. This includes challenging bullying.

*To a Sikh, all are equal in the eyes of God. As the Guru Granth Sahib says, 'The Divine light is within everyone' (GGS p13) and 'I am friendly towards everyone' (GGS 1299).*

## Gender roles and identity

It is important to distinguish between doctrine and culture when it comes to gender roles and stereotypes. There is strong teaching about equality in all faiths and many examples of leaders and followers treating women and men with equal dignity and worth, sometimes in opposition to the usual practice of the day. However, in some communities, history and culture may ossify more traditional roles. There is also a distinction between being equal and being the same.

### Christian

According to the Bible, women were the first to see the risen Jesus after the resurrection. Many times in his ministry Jesus acted to show the value of women. In one of the creation stories it clearly states, 'male and female he created them'.

*Within the Pentecostal tradition, the ideal expression of human sexuality is a marriage between a man and a woman to follow the perfect blueprint that God exacted in Eden. The boundaries of the ideal are not man-made, but divinely engineered. For this reason, we are not at liberty to alter them. That said, love and care should be shown to all, including those that fall outside of these parameters.*

I believe men and women are equal in value despite physical differences. More needs to be done to promote that equality in our society at all levels. However, I don't think we should confuse equality with sameness and we should recognise and celebrate the differences as a strength in society.

*Gender roles are not necessarily fixed. Both husbands and wives can be working breadwinners or carers and share roles in life as they see fit. For young people growing up it depends on their abilities, talents and preferences as to what activities they engage in - not their gender. Gender is fixed. In the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, in the unusual circumstances where gender is uncertain at birth the best advice of the medical profession is commonly accepted along with the parents' prayerful consideration.*

Quakers have been at the forefront of gender equality. That's not to say that stereotyping doesn't still exist. Quakers are embracing the issues of gender identity, not without some difficulty. Locally we are planning to replace "ladies" and "gents" toilets with individual gender-neutral cubicles. The question of who is entitled to access "women's safe spaces" has caused some friction nationally.

## **Hindu**

This is a very sensitive subject as it has been difficult to talk about in the past. Children nowadays are exposed to the social media, technology and learn about it in schools. Nowadays, some parents are able to talk about gender roles and gender identity but are still not very confident to approach this the right way.

*In Hinduism, men and women are valued equally and especially more recently. My own parents did not really treat me and my brother differently and have I have always felt that they have treated us the same. I think this is true in most Hindu families. I think you are valued as a person rather than for your gender.*

## **Humanist**

There is a spectrum of gender identity and expression, and a person may move on that spectrum during their life. There are no pre-determined gender roles, though there are societal expectations that may need to be challenged.

*Humanists believe in the right of all people to live their lives and to become the people they want to be. Children should be taught the golden rule of treating others the way they wish to be treated. This includes living by whatever gender or sexuality they choose, allowing and supporting others to do the same.*

## **Jewish**

Judaism has time bound obligations for men, such as set prayer times, whereas women's obligations are to do with keeping a kosher home and managing the education of the children. Learning is a lifelong expectation within a Jewish household. A man's and a woman's role in the household is equal but different in their practise. Homosexuality is forbidden in the Torah but everyone is welcome in the Synagogue and community. There are transgender questions that are still being considered, such as whether a man who now identifies as a woman can still be called to read from the Torah or how will they be buried. Every case has to be dealt with on an individual basis.

## **Muslim**

*Men and women both deserve equal respect. In Islam it is explained how a woman has a greater responsibility as she has to go through childbirth however needs to be supported by her husband in the upbringing and sharing workload etc. Even the prophet Muhammad supported his wife domestically and this is a point often made to stress the importance of supporting your wife in the home. There is a difference between culture and religion and in*

*some cultures, you will find the mind-set that men go out to work and women are the home makers. This again is more the case in more traditional households and the viewpoint amongst the first and second generations. Nowadays, it is less common with both parents going to work rather than having a stay at home parent.*

Islam teaches that men and women are designed for the same purpose and are equal in the eyes of God. Although men and women are equal, Islam recognises and honours the physiological and psychological differences between men and women. Women, for instance, are by default the child-bearers and so, financial provision falls on the man. The husband is expected to financially provide for the family and ensure they are given a good quality life. Islamically, the wife's income is her possession alone.

There are clear parameters around gender identity in Islam as the rules of the religion are instructed accordingly, as with the example above. The purpose for this is to ensure justice and harmony in society.

Islam clearly stipulates that every human being is born with free will and an innate right to be dignified, honoured and respected regardless of their gender, class or creed. Therefore, Muslims have a duty to respect everyone and their life choices.

## **Sikh**

For a Sikh, all are equal in the eyes of God. 'Why curse woman from whom all the greatest of men have been born. None can exist without a woman' (Guru Granth Sahib p473). Culturally, gender stereotypes can still exist despite this teaching. Souls are seen as beyond gender and everyone should be treated equally.

*Guru Nanak said, 'From woman, man is born; within woman, man is conceived; to woman he is engaged and married. So why call her inferior, as from her kings are born'. The Sikh Gurus taught that men and women are equal, based on the idea that all of humanity should be regarded as equal. Each partner has an equal role to play for ultimate spiritual development. In the Sikh history, one comes across various inspiring examples and role models of women who have made tremendous contributions and played a significant part.*

*Sikh ethical guidance covering the relationships between male and female is that a male should treat and respect a woman older than himself like his mother; of the same age group as himself like a sister; and those younger than himself like a daughter. Similarly, a female should treat and respect an older male like her father; that of the same age group as a brother; and a younger male like her son.*



# Being safe

## Listening to, and safeguarding, children and young people

**Robust safeguarding policies and protocols are required for every public and voluntary organisation. Over the past few years, faith communities have had to work hard at implementing these procedures and training is offered through local safeguarding boards as well as through many faith structures. One of the most important aspects of RSHE is the establishment of 'ground rules' to nurture a safe space and mutual respect. The value of listening and supporting young people is central for all faith communities.**

### Buddhist

Safeguarding policies, training and regular agenda items at trustees' meetings make sure we are looking after children, young people and vulnerable adults. For example, we make sure parents and guardians are with the children at all times, they are not left alone, and that staff and volunteers of the Buddhist Centre are trained to look out for their health and welfare.

### Christian

Pastors and youth leaders are able to provide a listening ear and a safe space while operating within our safeguarding policy. Services have breakout spaces to deal with issues as they arise. Where we are unable to support, we would recommend outside agencies.

*Safeguarding is essential to respecting everyone. So in my work I always encourage children and young people to be able to speak up about anything they need to share, especially if they are unhappy and to know who are the safe people they can speak to. We have a safeguarding policy and all our volunteers have criminal record disclosures and are expected to follow the policy.*

We believe children should be listened to. Church authorities advise to have frequent "Family Councils" where all voices can be heard and instruction given in a loving and tolerant atmosphere. Children should be taught at home about what dangers there are and how to combat them, for example not to keep secrets but talk openly about what they see, hear and experience. Dating is discouraged before age 16 and after 16 is best conducted in group activities. Our youth have a booklet titled "For the Strength of Youth" in which standards are set out that will, if adhered to, keep them safe. It is often referred to in home and youth meetings.

*Each Church has a safeguarding officer. This is, however, a serious work in progress in parishes and amongst clergy and lay persons involved in this area and training and updating of skills is taken seriously.*

## **Hindu**

In the Hindu community parents encourage their children to be able to speak and have a point of view and make them feel listened to by asking questions and enabling conversations.

*People in the community need to be well informed about safeguarding. People do try their best in making sure that their children are safe and will provide support wherever they can or seek help.*

## **Humanist**

Humanists would like to see children empowered and informed about their own rights and have the right to express their feelings. Children should be taught and encouraged to share their feelings and concerns and to explore concepts such as sexuality and gender from an early age.

*Children should be encouraged to talk about their feelings and their concerns from nursery age and earlier without fear of judgement or sanction. The development of non-judgmental and empathic thinking should be a key part of any curriculum. Children should be helped to understand their own wants and desires and be able to learn about exploitation and grooming and the signs of this, and to be provided with guidance about how to bring their concerns to the attention of responsible adults.*

## **Jewish**

Every Jewish school, Synagogue and youth organisation is expected to have a child protection officer and anyone who comes into contact with children will have a DBS check. Children will be made aware of whom they can approach if they have a problem and the safeguarding leads are trained to look and notice if a child is having a difficult time, so that an early intervention can be introduced.

In halacha there is the concept of *yichud*. Men are not allowed to be alone with girls over three years old, other than their daughters and granddaughters. The same applies to women and boys over nine years old. Within the family it is up to individuals to report abuse if they suspect it.

## Muslim

Islam holds children's safety, well-being and holistic development in the highest regard. We work together to offer a safe space for children to grow and reach their potential. First and foremost, the family unit is essential in Islam, for it offers the child a sense of belonging and safety. Parents understand they have a duty to nurture and equip their child with the necessary tools, namely, an education, hobbies and life skills to navigate through life safely and productively. They are also encouraged to stay up to date with ongoing societal changes, and by building a healthy rapport parents offer a safe space for their child to discuss personal struggles and seek guidance.

Islam teaches that every child is born innocent and is predisposed to love, kindness and caring tendencies. It is the environment that impacts their behaviour positively or negatively. That is why Islam emphasises nurturing the fitrah (natural disposition) of a child and requires parents to be fully aware of their children's innate traits, tendencies, talents, interests and aspirations. Parents are seen as guardians, educators and facilitators.

Islam also emphasises the importance of developing positive friendships for children. Beyond the family, the Muslim community works on initiatives like youth club, Muslim scouts, sports clubs, book clubs and other outdoor adventures where the child can foster positive and healthy friendships. Such community projects or youth organisations invest in training leaders with the appropriate skills and traits children can relate to and trust. Ultimately, offering children additional safe spaces outside of their homes.

No form of abuse is tolerated in Islam. Community spaces, religious venues and youth organisations provide safeguarding policies, DBS checks and staff training for youth workers. This is to ensure that all protocols are fully adhered to, and the child's safety and well-being is never compromised.

*The home is always a safe place and children can speak to parents. However this can be difficult due to parent's views differing from their children's therefore siblings or other members of the extended family, such as aunties or uncles may often be the listening ears. Children are always encouraged to speak to someone and ask for advice about any issues they may have.*

## Sikh

At the Gurdwara children and young people are encouraged to form their own network and to learn to engage in communal sewa (free service). Thus, they are able to share their

experiences with their peers. There are a number of online forums, social media channels where children and young people are able to come together and connect and share feelings. Most Gurdwaras have Panjabi schools and adhere to legal requirements for safeguarding, including safeguarding policy and designated personnel. There is also a 'Sikh helpline' through which children and young people can report safeguarding related issues and seek support.

## Non-medical drugs, including alcohol

**Religions stress the need for self-control, self-awareness and responsibility. Some traditions or communities forbid or abstain from any form of non-medical drugs, including alcohol and tobacco. A belief that a human life is created by God will imply that any kind of self-harm should be avoided.**

### Buddhist

Buddha showed that we are already under the control of many projections and distorted ways of thinking which make life difficult from day to day. To then add on another layer of distortion and hallucinations would be just making things worse. Buddha taught we need clear understanding of how we and all things exist, so substances which make the mind unclear would be doing exactly the opposite and making us less likely to liberate ourselves into happiness.

You can take five vows as a lay Buddhist. The fifth of these says you should take no intoxicants, which includes drugs or alcohol. Monks and nuns also take these vows for life. “Not even a drop from the tip of a blade of grass” is the advice for those with the vow of no alcohol! Why so strict? Because if we are intoxicated, drunk, then we are likely to break all the other vows we are trying to keep, like not stealing, not lying, celibacy.

*From a Buddhist perspective drugs and alcohol can lead us to not have the same level of control of our thoughts, speech and behaviour. Some Buddhists don't use them at all, others will be more moderate in their use of alcohol. It depends on what vows you have taken. I chose not to take the vow of 'no alcohol' or other intoxicants, because I enjoy having an occasional drink with friends, but I wouldn't drink more than one drink as I know the effect it has on my mind and actions.*

### Christian

Drugs and alcohol inhibit the individual's decision-making ability, thus meaning they are more likely to sin. For this reason, drugs in general are not considered appropriate. Addiction allows for demonic footholds which can cause long term issues for the individual. With specific regard to alcohol, it is not prohibited, merely drinking to excess is (as per St Paul's teaching).

*Christians believe our bodies are 'temples of the Holy Spirit who is the living presence of God.' That means we have to treat our bodies with respect and being very careful with any substance that can damage our bodies and minds, especially when they can be addictive.*

*Because it is not illegal to drink alcohol many Christians, including me, drink some alcoholic drinks but I do not use any illegal drugs.*

We have what we refer to as "The Word of Wisdom" or the Lord's law of health, a revelation given to the prophet Joseph Smith in 1833. It includes what is good for and what is harmful for our bodies. Hence, we abstain completely from alcohol and tobacco and also stimulating drinks, now identified as tea and coffee. We do not take drugs unless for medicinal purposes.

*Drugs and alcohol can be dangerous and need to be taken in moderation.*

Some Quakers believe in abstinence, but the majority take a view that alcohol can be enjoyed in moderation. We teach the dangers of over-indulgence and addiction. In my experience with other Quaker families with similar age children to our own, we have tried to de-mystify and de-glamourise alcohol, and allow our children to try alcohol in a safe setting from their mid-teens.

## **Hindu**

Some Hindus choose to drink in moderation but in some castes it is not permitted. It is sometimes believed that all Hindus don't drink but this is not a fact. However, illegal drugs are not allowed at all.

## **Humanist**

Drugs, including alcohol, exist and there is no point being coy about them. Many children see their parents, relations and older siblings consuming alcohol and sometimes drugs. Many children do not have this experience at all, so it is important in education to be culturally sensitive but also realistic and open about these matters. The emphasis should be about safety, making informed, appropriate and safe choices and also respecting the law. Children should be encouraged to ask questions and develop their own views about alcohol and drugs.

## **Jewish**

Drug taking is a problem in society today. Illegal drugs are not allowed but we realise that many children will experiment with them. Everything will be done to try and ensure that illegal drug taking is avoided. Alcohol is taken in moderation every Friday night, Shabbat and festivals when a blessing is made over a glass of wine. Children will be given grape juice until they are old enough to have some wine. They are taught that it is a part of the religion and to have alcohol in moderation is permissible.

*We are commanded to 'guard our souls'. This includes avoiding drugs, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption. Wine is used on sacramental occasions as well as at mealtimes, especially on the Sabbath and holidays.*

## **Muslim**

*In Islam, drugs and alcohol are both prohibited. This is due to the effect it has on a person's health and mind. Any substance that alters your state of mind is not allowed.*

The primary purpose of Islamic law is to serve justice and to restore balance. One of the five key objectives in the Islamic Law is the preservation of intellect. It is through intellect that societies advance in science and technology. Intoxicants like alcohol or drugs contradict this main principle for Muslims. By clouding reason and judgment, serious harm can be caused to the individual and wider community like health problems, criminal activity and economic ills. Therefore, anything that intoxicates the mind is strictly prohibited in Islam.

## **Sikh**

To reach a state of universal consciousness requires the need for mental discipline and the use of drugs detracts from this. Consequently, the Sikh Gurus banned the use of intoxicants including alcohol and drugs. It is physically harmful and mentally disturbing and hinders spiritual development. The body is considered the Temple of God and therefore a Sikh treats his or her body like a Gurdwara – a sacred gift to be treated with respect. The Sikh Rehat Maryada (the Sikh Code of Conduct) states: 'A Sikh must not take hemp (cannabis), opium, liquor, tobacco, in short any intoxicant'.

*Baptised Sikhs should not take any drugs including alcohol. Generally many Sikhs do drink alcohol and it is usually served at Sikh weddings and some may also take drugs. Alcoholism is also a problem in some Sikh families and communities.*

## Intimate and sexual relationships

**Almost universally, organised religions see the place for sexual relationships to be within the marriage of a man and a woman with a commitment of lifelong intent. There is recognition that reality does not always match aspiration. Increasingly, some traditions and individual believers feel strongly that same sex relationships, including marriage, should be recognised and respected.**

### Buddhist

It is easy to get caught up in the senses with sex, the mind and body craving more pleasure. Reducing our attachment to the senses is one of the core teachings of the Buddha, so what is important is the context of a sexual relationship being an expression of loving kindness for the other person, regardless of their gender or marital status. Often longer-term relationships make this more likely. Monks and nuns take vows of celibacy, but lay practitioners don't usually. They can however take a vow of no sexual misconduct, which means no sex outside your marriage if you are married.

### Christian

Intimate sexual relationships ought to take place in a loving, stable marriage between a man and a woman. This mirrors God's blueprint in Eden and ultimately, his divine intention for human love and sexuality. It is not ideal for anything to happen beyond these parameters, though everything is redeemable.

*Intimate and sexual relationships are only to be conducted in the sanctity of marriage.*

Sex is a beautiful thing and the best place for it is in a loving marriage.

*Catholic Christian life is about the beauty and fullness of human dignity. Rules exist to bring this about – as for example, rules in school and in society are there to help the underlying values to be put in practice. The Church teaches that, at the end of the day, we will be judged on love and on the way we have followed our conscience. The rules are there to help us form that conscience, and not as orders to be followed blindly. There is a lot of discussion about all of these areas at present. Part of the problem is that the hierarchy of the church is led by very old men who largely wish to retain the status quo as when they were young, but further down the line there are many very loyal persons, both clergy and laity, who bring a more compassionate stance to these difficult questions since the reality is that we live 'in the world' and not in isolation from it.*



## Hindu

I think the main teaching would be to be safe and to not feel pressured in relationships so that you are not coerced into doing anything you do not want to. I think having respect for yourself and others is part of the Hindu culture and this transfers to intimate relationships.

## Humanist

Humanism promotes respect, so does not prohibit any form of intimate relationship between consenting adults, as long as it is based on mutual respect.

*The Humanist view is based on ensuring that children and young people are empowered to make safe, informed and appropriate choices. We believe that children should be provided with unbiased information on contraception, STIs, abortion, sexual orientation, and the many forms of family relationship conducive to individual fulfilment and the stability of society. We firmly oppose the intolerant and repressive attitudes to human sexuality expressed by some religious and political groups and individuals.*

## Jewish

In Orthodox Judaism sex before marriage isn't allowed. If a couple are strictly Orthodox then they will not be allowed to touch or even hold hands before marriage. An Orthodox married couple will sleep separately when a woman is menstruating until she has been to the Mikvah to purify herself and marital relations can resume. Many traditional Jewish couples will live together before marriage nowadays.

## Muslim

Islam is unashamedly proud of its approach to sex and intimacy. It teaches that sexual expression is a form of intimacy. Islam teaches that sex is a primal instinct given by God as a gift to humans to enjoy and procreate. However, there are clear sexual ethics in Islam:

- Sex outside marriage is totally prohibited;
- Sex must be always consensual and mutual;
- Sex must be always between one man and one woman;
- Sex must be a private affair of love and affection;
- Sexual acts should not be performed anally or during a woman's menstruation.

Islam encourages development of intimacy between the husband and wife through acts of love, generosity, affection, mercy and time spent together. Amongst the many duties of the Muslim men and women is responsibility to maintain a healthy sexual relationship during

their marriage. The Qur'an asks Muslims to treasure this sacred relationship by calling one another a garment, draped and interwoven by love and mercy.

*Islam says that all intimate and sexual relationships should be between a husband and wife therefore are prohibited before marriage.*

## **Sikh**

Like a lot of mainstream religions, Sikhism does not permit premarital sex. Lust is one of the five 'thieves' that Sikhs must resist: lust, rage, greed, conceit and attachment. Premarital sex is regarded as driven by lust and therefore should be avoided. Monogamy is also important in Sikhism. Sikhism teaches against premarital sex, because we are taught to control our desires, especially sexual ones until we are fully committed to a relationship. Another reason why we do not allow premarital sex is because it is a direct command from the Guru. Baptised Sikhs will symbolise this by wearing kachera as a symbol of chastity. Culturally, intimacy is becoming more acceptable, for example if two Sikhs engaged to be married show affection such as holding hands or hugging.

*In general, intimate and sexual relationships are to be conducted in the confines of a loving relationship within marriage. Sikhs place a high value on family life and having children. Therefore, any sexual relationships outside of marriage are forbidden.*

## Close and intimate relationships between people of the same sex

Most official religious teaching opposes sexual relationships between people of the same sex. This area has been controversial and divisive within communities for some decades, almost a totemic issue. At the same time, many faith communities will welcome gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender people as individuals. Some communities officially accept the validity of same sex relationships and will conduct marriage services, including Liberal Judaism, Methodists, Quakers and Unitarians.

### Buddhist

Buddhism teaches that loving relationships, including sexual relationships, are a valid and necessary part of being human. The important thing is that one respects the other person, thinking about their needs and not harming them in any way, including using sex as manipulation or to harm others. Relationships can be between two men or two women, this doesn't matter. Buddha taught that love is "wishing the other to have happiness."

### Christian

God has the same love for all of his children regardless of their choices. For this reason, he calls all to conform to creation order. The will of God is the same for every individual and to that end, it is not discriminatory to say that marriage is the ideal relationship for all within the parameters that God himself set out. That said, if a person has not chosen to be part of the Church, then they have chosen their own path as opposed to God's intended path. Those who have chosen to submit their lives to God also submit themselves to the council of the elders, pastors and leaders. These individuals, under biblical teaching, will be judged more harshly due to their authority and so cannot risk propagating false teaching when expounding the Gospel. God wants his creation to live life to the full, and this can only be achieved by our will corresponding to that of the Father.

*Sexual relationships between people of the same sex are frowned upon. Pope Francis' words to the Catholic bishops of Jamaica indicate this official stance.*

*'Pope Francis has over the years acknowledged the reality that same sex unions exist. He has always expressed the teaching of the Church that all persons by the fact that they have been given the gift of life by the Almighty possess a dignity that no one or no power can take away.' 'Pope Francis is not approving same sex behaviour or the legal recognition of homosexual unions as equivalent to marriage'.*

My church community would teach the best place for sex is in a loving marriage. However, my faith and church also teach me to have compassion on those with different views and

love people regardless of their choices. This goes back to Jesus' most important commandments, love God and love your neighbour.

*Twice in my life I was sent to Christian counsellors who were meant to help me to 'deal with' (aka 'heal me from') being gay, through prayer and counselling. It took me some years to realise this was absurd, even though it was intended kindly. I discovered that what really matters in a relationship is trust, honesty, commitment and unconditional love, not the gender or name of the other person.*

In our church, we are not to criticise others who believe differently to us. We can discuss our differences in an atmosphere of understanding and gentleness and preserve each other's rights as neighbours, workmates, friends and fellow citizens, whenever occasion may arise.

*Quakers have been at the forefront of gay rights and same-sex marriage. When I started worshipping at my current Quaker Meeting, I developed a sense that it was something of a refuge for gay Christians who had not been able to find acceptance in other churches. However, some Quakers will still be uncomfortable with intimate gestures in public between same sex partners.*

## **Hindu**

Sexual relationships between people of the same gender is seen as bad and not allowed. This didn't used to be talked about in the open, which was a shame and unacceptable. Children nowadays have a better understanding as it is talked about in the open and in schools.

*I personally do not have a problem with people who choose to have relationships with people of the same gender. I also feel that my parents and extended family think the same. This goes back to accepting people as they are which I think is a fundamental foundation of Hinduism.*

## **Humanist**

Humanists support the right of people to form consensual relationships with whomsoever they choose, in pursuance of their own happiness. This should be based on people being given the opportunity, encouragement and space to make safe, well-informed and appropriate choices without any moral judgement or condemnation from others. Humanists fundamentally support the rights of LBGTQ+ communities to live their lives as they wish and promote a general tolerance and celebration of the diversity of each other's lifestyle choices.

## **Jewish**

Intimate relationships between people of the same gender is forbidden in Orthodox Judaism. They will be welcomed as individuals in the community but their relationship will not be recognised. Reform, Liberal and Progressive Judaism allow same-sex marriages.

*The Torah forbids male homosexual intercourse, so boys are encouraged to look for female partners when they are ready to get married. Lesbianism, while not explicitly forbidden in the Torah, is discouraged. If children turn out to be genuinely homosexual then they are encouraged to be celibate, a major test for them. The Torah frowns upon the act, not the person.*

## **Muslim**

Islam identifies family structure and lineage to be two important components for a cohesive society. Marriage must therefore be sanctified. While Islam recognises that Muslims may be predisposed to any desire or inclination, sexual relationships outside of a marriage or between people of the same gender remains impermissible. Regardless of whatever sexual orientation an individual belongs to, Islam stipulates that every human being is born with an innate right to be respected and tolerated in a wider community. Islam does not condone the desire, only the act and Muslims should provide inclusion and support for their community.

*Relationships between the same gender are frowned upon and prohibited. This isn't discussed as openly but could be due to lack of understanding and knowledge.*

## **Sikh**

For Sikhs the most important thing is that relationship should be loving. However, culturally this can still be a taboo issue.

*Same gender relationships are not recognised in Sikhism. It is not considered a norm and no references to it are found in either scriptures or historical accounts.*

## Pregnancy, contraception and abortion

**Most faith communities accept most kinds of contraception. However, some religions oppose artificial contraception as preventing natural procreation according to God's will. Individual believers will often make their own decisions based on their informed conscience. Abortion is far more widely controversial and is seen by many as undermining the sanctity of life, but this is by no means unanimous and views will often depend on individual circumstances.**

### Buddhist

Buddha taught that we shouldn't harm, so whilst contraception is acceptable, it would be difficult to say that abortion is not harming another. HH the Dalai Lama once said that if you are a Buddhist you shouldn't harm another by having an abortion, but if you're not a Buddhist then you have to decide on the individual circumstances.

### Christian

Pregnancy is a gift from God and, within the setting of a loving marriage, it is perfect partnering with God in the process of creation. With regard to contraception, as no life has started at this point, there is no impact on life. It is sensible to use contraception for a host of reasons ranging from the sensible prevention of overburdening a family (who are required to love, care and provide for children as best they can) to the prevention of passing on infections. That said, there is a stark contrast between preventing a pregnancy and forcibly removing it. Abortion is a violation of God's laws and can be equated to playing the part of God. At the same time, if a person has chosen this course, the church must respond with sensitivity and love.

*Pregnancy outside marriage is not desirable. In the past, parish priests might have said 'you have to get married', or 'you have committed a mortal sin and need to confess', or both. Contraception is not welcome, but also not really talked about much. The official line is that the 'rhythm method' is acceptable. Abortion is definitely opposed. All of these views represent the official line and there is much sympathy and laxity practised among different groups of loyal Catholics. Pastoral support is always a key thing. As with many things I am certain that in various pockets of the Church community support is afforded to those who find themselves in these difficult situations.*

Psalm 139 says that God 'knit' us together in our mother's wombs and that we are 'fearfully and wonderfully made.' I have actively supported a charity that offered women alternatives to abortion because I believe human life worthy of respect begins in the womb, while respecting an individual's legal right to make good decisions about their own bodies. In my

experience even when women believe that an abortion was the right decision, they are often very sad about it. Part of the work of this charity was to offer parenting support because raising children is a very demanding thing and many people struggle even when they are seeking to do their best. Contraception is a good thing because it enables people to express intimate love without fear of an unwanted pregnancy.

*Children are a gift from God, contraception is good for family planning. Abortion is a very difficult topic and my belief system teaches me to value all life equally. For me the question is when does life begin and I don't have a clear position on that and I think many in my faith community are the same. As mentioned above, my faith also teaches me to have compassion on those with different views and those with really difficult choices to make, and love people regardless of their choices.*

Regarding abortion, I think the majority view among Quakers would be pro-choice, supporting the woman/couple to make her/their own decision in a non-judgmental way. Certainly for me, the earlier in the pregnancy the better.

## **Hindu**

Precautions should be taken and contraception is allowed. Abortions are not seen as a right way forward but it is an individual's choice in their circumstances.

*People should be able to choose what contraception they wish to use and I also believe that abortion may have to be a choice for some women for a variety of reasons.*

## **Humanist**

Humanists encourage the empowerment of all people to make well-informed safe and appropriate choices and to be in charge of their own bodies. This obviously includes making choices about pregnancy whether planned or unplanned and Humanists generally believe in the wide availability of the full range of contraception options and appropriate safe, evidence based guidance being available and accessible as needed. Humanists generally believe in the availability of safe and secure abortion on the NHS as a choice for all women who need this. Humanists are opposed to the restriction of choice and any attempt to criminalise choice.

## **Jewish**

The most important tenet of Judaism is to save life above everything else. The Torah tells us to be fruitful and multiply. However if it is dangerous for the woman to have a child then contraception is allowed. In reality, most women will use some form of contraception

except for the ultra-Orthodox community. Family life is important in Judaism. When a woman has had a child then it is usual for the community to take meals round and support the family to help after the birth of a child. If abortion is necessary for the sake of the mother's life, then it is allowed but it is not encouraged.

## **Muslim**

*Pregnancy is acknowledged as very blessed, the bringing of new life into the world. Abortion is acceptable if the pregnancy is a risk to the person's health. Contraception is widely used within the community for many reasons and is acceptable especially with the younger generation. I think this was less used with the older generation but again this could be due to lack of knowledge and understanding.*

Marriage in Islam is a mutual relationship between husband and wife where both individuals consult each other on matters such as the size of their family. Family planning to regulate the family size for safety, health or economic reasons is permissible in Islam and as such, Muslims can use contraception. This must be decided by the couple. On the other hand, abortion after the first 4 months of pregnancy amounts to the taking of a life and is impermissible. Preservation of life is one of the five objectives in the Islamic Law and the decision of an abortion is not taken lightly. If the mother's life is threatened at any stage of the pregnancy, then abortion is allowed.

## **Sikh**

Sikhs believe that all life is sacred and God given. Contraception is a matter for individual choice. Abortion is only acceptable in extreme circumstances, such as rape or if the mother's life is at risk.

*Nothing in Sikh scripture or tradition condemns the use of contraception. It is left to a couple to decide how many children they want and can support. Abortion is prohibited except if the mother's condition is medically endangered or in case of rape.*



## Equality for boys and girls in decisions about close relationships

Historically, the concept of male 'headship' has been a theme in religions, and more widely in human community. This is based on sacred texts, underlaid by traditional culture. At the same time, the call of equality and justice also lies at the heart of much authoritative writing and theology. So there is sometimes an ambiguous approach to gender, with distinct roles made for men and women. Culturally, stereotyping and resistance to equality can exist and sometimes these practices claim religious justification.

### Buddhist

When deciding about close relationships, my understanding of Buddhist thought is that, as long as you are not harming others, including yourself, then they are fine. What comes from Buddha's teachings is the more individuals think of the happiness of others, the greater their own happiness becomes. If we just focus on our own happiness and exclude others, then conversely, we become less happy.

### Christian

This begins with respect for yourself as someone made in the image of God. In British history as in many nations, girls and women were often denied their freedom to make their own decisions about close relationships because they had to conform to the expectations of their families. This was wrong but it has taken a long while for girls to have the same freedom as boys and men. Knowing you are named as an individual before God who is responsible for your own life, made in the image of God and of incredible worth, can help give you confidence about making decisions about close relationships. Of course, the advice and wisdom of families and friends and your faith community can be very helpful and because these decisions are often life changing I have found it helpful to call on the kindness and insight of people I love and trust even if I haven't followed their advice.

*I believe that Jesus' teaching is that everyone is seen equal under God and we should love people.*

A paramount belief in our Faith in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day saints is "Free Agency" - the right to choose. Ultimately people of whatever age or persuasion will make their own decisions. We believe that a loving Heavenly Father has given us commandments that guide us in the best way for our ultimate happiness. He will not force us to obey Him. Therefore we have to accept that some will choose differently to what we consider to be the truth. We trust that our young people will always know that whatever decisions they make they are always welcome in our families and at our church activities. There is no ostracism.

## **Hindu**

Hinduism encourages young people, both male and female, to take responsibility for themselves and to have respect for others. I think this then translates into an inner confidence and promotes behaviour and ways of being respectful and considerate.

## **Humanist**

Humanists are opposed to any attempts to hide or restrict access to knowledge and understanding about any particular legal and appropriate lifestyle choice for children on the basis of any religious or other world view. The opportunity to learn about the diversity of human relationships including sexuality, gender etc should be enshrined as part of learning from an early age.

## **Jewish**

In some Orthodox communities, marriages may be arranged through a matchmaker or Shadchan. The couple will meet in a public environment for a few times to see if they are right for each other. Both parties have the right to say no to a match, so this is an arranged marriage not a forced one, which is illegal. Modern Orthodox and traditional Jewish couples will have been to Jewish youth organisations which will have had discussions about choosing the right partner and about what marriage means to them so that they have the confidence to make decisions about close relationships. There will be discussions about marrying out of the Faith and what the repercussions might be. It will be up to the individuals as to which path they choose.

*In the traditional community there is a match-making process. There are no enforced marriages. Since we believe successful marriages are based on shared goals and attitudes, prospective partners research these areas before the first date. If, after a few dates, either party does not believe the other is right for them, the match is called off before someone is hurt emotionally. Girls and boys are equal in this process.*

## **Muslim**

*Islam makes it very clear that a woman and man both have equal rights and should both protect and support each other throughout life. Any decisions made about close relationships should be made by both parties with consent required from both.*

Islam teaches that men and women are designed by God and share the same status and purpose. More importantly, God created humans with a free will and so anything that

contradicts this free will, like a forced marriage, is prohibited in Islam. Men and women are expected to fulfil different roles in a marriage. While women carry a child for 9-months and look after their new-born child, men are expected to financially provide for the family. In Islam, the wife's income is her possession alone. Should she choose to spend it on her family, this would be out of her good will and considered a form of charity. Domestic chores and raising children are the responsibility of both the husband and wife. There are clear parameters around gender identity in Islam as the rules of the religion are instructed accordingly, as with the example above. The purpose for this is to ensure justice and harmony in society.

## **Sikh**

Sikhism teaches that men and women are equal and are entitled to the same opportunities as each other. Culturally, some stereotypes still exist about responsibilities for men and women.

*According to Sikh teachings there should be no discrimination in providing educational and career opportunities between male and/or female young persons. This should lead them to developing confidence and responsible attitude. Whilst the concept of marriage is well defined, how this process takes place varies and is often underpinned by cultural practices. It can vary from couples falling in love and wanting to marry to assisted marriage where the parents are first involved in seeking a suitable partner. The ultimate decision is left to the couple guided by the teaching that the key to any relationship is love and mutual respect. Forced marriages are forbidden. It is important that young persons are made aware of the ethics relating to relationships with person of opposite sex as stated in the Sikh Rehat Maryada (Code of Conduct).*

## Contributors

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of advisers, teachers and members of faith communities, among them:

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## The Small Print

Great care has gone into the writing and compilation of this resource. The individual views and perspectives reflect the valued opinions and experience of the contributors. However, no claim is made that these necessarily reflect the official teachings of religious organisations or the policies of local authorities concerned.



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Since September 2020 schools have been required to follow statutory guidance on teaching Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) in English schools. Standing Advisory Councils on RE in West Yorkshire point schools and parents to the national and local guidance provided. However, recognising the links between RSHE and beliefs, SACRES feel this background information will inform, support and enlighten teachers and others concerned with the delivery of RSHE. The aims are to offer a range of viewpoints from people of faith about the specific areas covered in the RSHE curriculum, to support teachers with background information, to reassure parents that faith perspectives are recognised and to signpost appropriate sources of guidance.