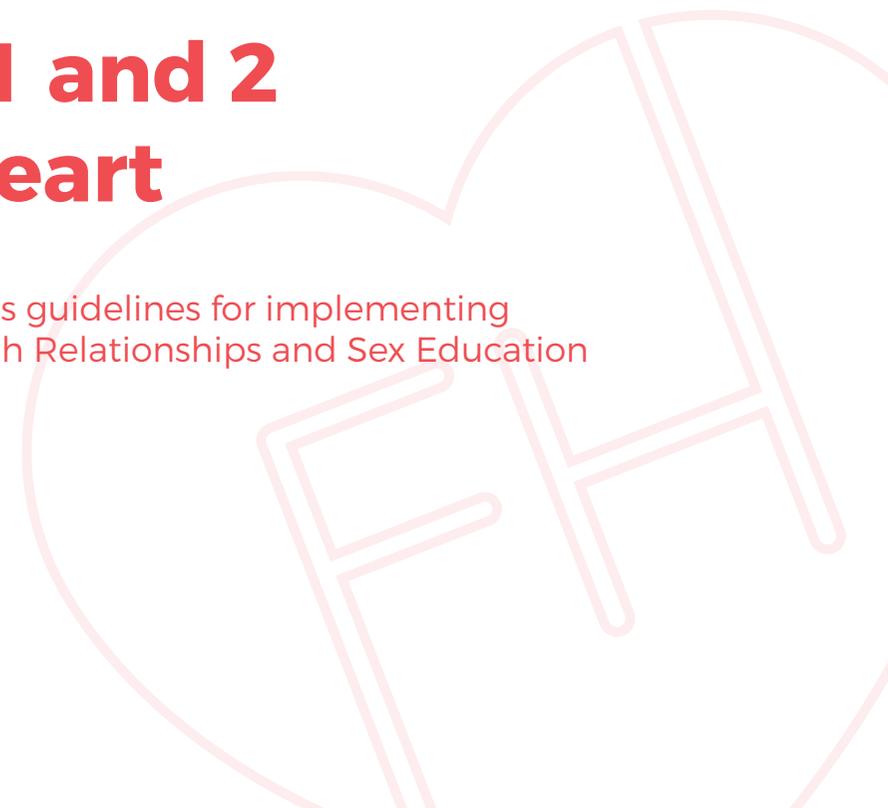




Fertile Heart

CES Vision for KS1 and 2 and A Fertile Heart

How A Fertile Heart meets the Catholic Education Services guidelines for implementing the Department of Education's statutory requirement to teach Relationships and Sex Education



CES Vision for KS1 and 2 and A Fertile Heart

The Catholic Bishops Conference of England and Wales gave us *Learning to Love*, in 2017, to guide RSE education in our schools. They focus on a few key points. Firstly, that learning to love is a life-time's journey, and in particular, "Marital love, which lies at the heart of *Amoris Laetitia*, and which we see as the model of all loving relationships, is a continuous lesson in learning how to love" (p. 2).

Within this, sex education "can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 280). Thus, sex education can only be properly given within relationship education, and as "all relationships point towards the relationship we have with our Creator, and prepare us for its fulfilment in the world to come" (AL 221), such education has to be focused on our relationship with the Creator, and how this is reflected in our other relationships, especially marriage. From this *A Fertile Heart* focuses on the journey of growth - in knowledge and love - within that setting of relationship with God, and each other, particularly in marriage and family life. The process of growth learnt by the children regarding relationship is the same process of growth they will be encouraged to apply to their sexuality, understood within relationship, in later years. So, our emphasis is on that process of maturing in mutual self-giving, rather than opening up the specific dimension of sexuality too early.

Secondly, *Learning to Love* tells us that we can only discover ourselves, and cooperate with our own growth, when we first accept our given-ness as creatures: the creation of me, body and soul, is a gift to me, and then to others. So, our bishops emphasise the importance of Genesis 1-3, in highlighting that we are made in the image of God, as male and female, who are very good (Gen. 1:26-31); that, within that original equality and complementarity, Eve came from Adam, and was brought towards him by God, leading to Adam clinging to her, and them becoming one flesh (cf. Gen. 2:18-25). However, the story of the Fall (Gen. 3) records how sin fractures original harmony, making us less human. All this reveals that "we 'make sense' only in relationship with each other" (p. 6).

All this gives the foundation for *A Fertile Heart*. We focus on being created out of love, by God; on the journey of love that each child is called to undertake; and on the importance of receiving and giving in authentic relationship.

In particular, KS1 focuses on Genesis 1-3, and uses the story of Noah, of Joseph, and Jesus' own parables and teaching to immerse the children in knowing that they are loved children of God, who feeds them and calls them to cooperate in their growth. A theme running through the years is that God feeds our body, mind and heart, so as to grow healthily, and in truth and love. We can cooperate with all these, and by learning to love we also help others grow too. This follows the central themes the CES gives us: Created and Loved by God; Created to Love Others; Created to Live in Community - and the reason for this order: God's love for us helps us to love ourselves, which helps us to love those around us, which helps us to love all people.

Year 3 continues to be Bible-led, using John's Gospel to help the children learn more about receiving and giving; about marriage and relationships; about learning how to decrease so that he may increase (Jn. 3:30); and about trust in God being at the heart of all our growth. Relationship and fertility go hand-in-hand - we grow more, help each other grow more and make a bigger difference, in loving relationship. This is why our programme is called *A Fertile Heart* and why we focus in Y3 on Jesus' teaching on being fruitful in him (Jn. 15).

All this is reflected in our deepest desires - to love and be loved, to know and be known, to grow and be fertile, and to be happy. A third key point of *Learning to Love* is the importance of getting in touch with these desires. It is only in gradually understanding our deeper desires that we slowly learn how to respond to all our desires, impulses and influences.

This is an important dimension of Y4-6, when we start to help the children to self-reflect in a more systematic way. This begins with them understanding their desire to be happy, and the difference between joy and pleasure. This leads to them understanding that all the deeper desires just mentioned lead to a deeper joy, whereas we are also tempted by more immediate, maybe stronger desires, that only lead to short-term pleasure.

As said, all this only makes sense in the context of relationship with God, reflected in our relationships with each other. It is within this understanding that the initiator - receiver and responder model is introduced. When John tells us, "this is the love I mean: not our love for God, but God's love for us... We are to love, then, because he loved us first" (1 John 4:10, 19), he is articulating a fundamental truth: that, amazingly, God is inviting us into an equality of relationship in love, through loving us first so that we may love in return. This is such a central understanding of what it is to be human, that we do introduce it early - in Year 4, and help the children experience it through the prayer session that unites all modules from 4e onwards. When we later see how this is reflected in different ways in different human relationships (e.g. 6c), it is so that the unity and harmony of all live-giving relationship can be seen. We also see how the Mass and the sacraments enter us into this relationship with God, and thence each other (4i and 4j).

Applying this insight to human relationships, we see the importance of truly understanding freedom, tolerance, obedience, trust, person and nature, and the difference between discerning and deciding truth. The CES puts virtue at the centre of RHE, and virtue is formed when our reason helps us understand our emotions and directs them in line with God and the good. Central to being able to do this, our children need to clearly understand the rationality of there being a God, and the importance of truth and reason is owning and developing ourselves. Therefore, this is key to several KS2 modules.

In fulfilment of the bullet points in the CES model curriculum, the above understanding: is faithful to the Church's vision of human wholeness, in a way that recognises our contemporary context; provides a very positive view of the human person and human relationship - the only sure foundation for later communicating a positive view of human sexuality; gradually helps equip our children to make good practical judgements, through understanding themselves and others better; and explores and promotes virtue, for which truth and reason are essential.

Furthermore, our teacher books, and particularly the powerpoints for each module, ensure all this is delivered in an age appropriate way. Our style and the home activities and missions of KS1 help fully involve parents in their child's journey - as their prime educators; this is further helped in KS2 by helping the children 'take the day's discussion home with them'. Our mix of activities also help RSE to be cross curricular. We deliberately leave the teaching of reproductive science to be discretely taught, and similarly do not try and replace existing good teaching in safeguarding, but rather (through modules 1f3 - slightly, 2f2 and 6h) reinforce good practice with a coherent RHE understanding.

The positive, loving atmosphere of *A Fertile Heart*, its focus on age appropriate discussion, and its sensitive language, means it is fully inclusive of any mix of children in the class. Our aim is that the fully laid out module plans, by doing the spadework for the teachers, empower and free them to concentrate on the teaching itself - for it is always the teachers themselves who are their own best resource. Indeed, from feedback, we have found that helping teachers feel confident and equipped to deliver what is being asked of them is crucially important, and often the ingredient that is missing in good RSE implementation. We would always be willing to discuss with any DES, academy or school how we could further help in all this.