



# Relationships & Sex Education: A Submission from the Family Stability Network and Centre for Social Justice

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**fastn**  
FAMILY STABILITY NETWORK

**CSJ** The Centre for  
Social Justice

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# Relationships and Sex Education - A Submission from the Family Stability Network and The Centre For Social Justice

## Executive Summary

The Family Stability Network (FASTN) and Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) are jointly calling for new guidance on Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) to help young people develop the knowledge and relationship skills they will need today and in the future.

This short report responds to recent legislative changes contained within the Children and Social Work Act (2017) which makes Relationships Education at Primary school and Relationships and Sex Education in Secondary school compulsory in all schools England in 2019. The Act also requires the Department for Education to publish statutory guidance on the provision of Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education. The government is currently undertaking a process of consultation before publication of this guidance and this short report responds to that consultation.

**Separating Relationships Education from Sex Education:** The teaching of relationship skills should be considered an important life skill and not simply part of a Sex Education curriculum. Relationships Education should help to address issues faced by young people today and equip them for adulthood.

Helping young people master relationships and become relationally literate adults can help to improve long term family stability and public health outcomes associated with distressed relationships.

Normalising the discussion of relationship quality will also improve the take up of relationships support later in life. Developing relationship skills should be seen as an early intervention approach to improving family stability alongside addressing the challenges faced by young people today.

**The views of young people:** The Centre for Social Justice and Family Stability Network commissioned an opinion poll of 14 - 17 year olds living in England to understand their views on Relationships and Sex Education. This opinion poll was conducted by Survation in December 2017 and is weighted to provide a representative sample of opinion.

- Almost three quarters (**72 per cent**) of young people aged 14-17 wanted relationship education to help them understand how to build long term, lasting relationships as an adult. A long term, lasting relationship in adult life is important or very important to **77 per cent** of teenagers.
- While eight out of ten young people actively want to get married in the future, young people are evenly split (**41 per cent vs 39 per cent**) when it comes to understanding the important role of marriage in supporting long term relationship stability in adult relationships.
- Modern Relationships and Sex Education needs to be delivered online as well as in the classroom with almost six out of ten (**58 per cent**) young people looking for relationship advice and information online with **42 per cent** saying there isn't enough good information or advice online. Young people are least likely to go to a teacher for advice.



- In a separate opinion poll conducted by the Family Stability Network almost half of young men aged 16-19 (**46 per cent**) have carried on a relationship they wanted to finish and **45 per cent** have felt ashamed of the way they've treated a partner. Despite this a third of young men felt they could talk to their partner about almost anything but not about their relationship.

## Recommendations

**An Innovation Fund for Relationships and Sex Education delivered online:** A report by Ofcom in 2017 found that a typical 12-15 year old spends almost a day a week (21 hours) online. The way young people receive information and go looking for it has changed and the provision of Relationships and Sex Education needs to reflect this.

**Recommendation:** When the Secretary of State launches new guidance on Relationships and Sex Education in schools, the Department for Education should also announce a new dedicated Innovation Fund to encourage the development of 'kite marked' online information and guidance. A Department for Education backed Innovation Fund would ensure there is high quality online provision for young people alongside classroom based RSE.

**Developing relationships skills for adulthood:** To enable young people to achieve their ambition of lasting relationships in adulthood Relationships Education needs to equip young people with the understanding and skills to develop these relationships.

Through the teaching of relationship skills in school, Relationships Education can help to 'normalise' discussions around relationship health and how to address problems within relationships increasing the uptake of relationship support later on in life.

**Recommendation:** New statutory guidance on Relationships and Sex Education should make a clear distinction between Sex Education and Relationships Education. Relationships Education should help older teenagers understand how clear commitment, good communication and being able to resolve conflict set the foundations for a successful relationship.

**Marriage:** Marriage is not just any other type of relationship. Marriage (as a public expression of commitment) is the most stable form of family relationship and it is important to recognise the distinctive and special place of marriage in our culture and an aspiration for young people.

When young people are asked about their long term relationship goals almost 78 per cent of 14-18 year olds say they want to get married. The government should not be neutral in helping young people to achieve their long term relationship goals. To do this the government can't be neutral on marriage.

**Recommendation:** New statutory guidance should specifically refer to marriage and help young people to reflect on why it is considered important. In particular statutory guidance should not omit the word 'marriage'. The Secretary of State should ensure that statutory guidance contains a strong statement of support for marriage based on the existing guidance issued in 2000 and Section 148 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

## Why Relationships Education Matters

The previous Secretary of State was clear that ‘young people must have an education that teaches them the importance of healthy and stable relationships.’<sup>1</sup>

Relationships Education should not just be about sex. It needs to be considered an important life skill and not conflated with sex or Sex Education. An approach that focuses on relational skills should seek to address some of the biggest challenges faced by young people today as well as tackling some of our most serious long term social policy issues:

### Tackling sexual bullying in schools

A survey of young girls aged 13-21 conducted by the Girl Guides found 64 per cent of girls had experienced sexual violence or sexual harassment at school or college in the past year<sup>2</sup>. Previous research conducted by the NSPCC has found that one in three girls and one in six boys have experienced sexual violence from a partner<sup>3</sup>. According to a report by the Children’s Commissioner sexual bullying and abuse is increasingly seen as ‘normal and inevitable’<sup>4</sup>.

Helping young people to understand what is and is not healthy within a relationship can help tackle the problem of sexual bullying and violence among school aged children.

### Improving life chances

A major evidence review conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions recently described the relationship between parents as the ‘primary’ influence on the life chances of their children.<sup>5</sup>

The Government is currently developing a new programme to improve parental relationships and reduce conflict but RSE has a role to play too. By helping young people to understand how to work through problems in a relationship we can help to improve life chances both for children as they become adults and in reductions to future family conflict.

### Improving family stability

Building the foundations for long term family stability will also help ensure fewer children grow up experiencing family breakdown.

Relationships Education has an important role to play in reducing the long term trend of family breakdown by equipping young people with the skills and knowledge to achieve their long term ambition for a lasting relationship in adulthood. Through reforms to the way we teach relationships in schools the government can normalise the discussion of relationships and take up of relationships support later in life.

1 <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/education-secretary-launches-rse-call-for-evidence>

2 <https://www.girlguiding.org.uk/social-action-advocacy-and-campaigns/research/girls-attitudes-survey>

3 NSPCC, Partner exploitation and violence in teenage intimate relationships, London: NSPCC, 2009, p5

4 Coy M, Kelly L, Elvines F, Garner M and Kanyeredzi A, ‘Sex without consent, I suppose that is rape’: How young people in England understand sexual consent, Office of the Children’s Commissioner, November 2013

5 <http://www.eif.org.uk/publication/what-works-to-enhance-inter-parental-relationships-and-improve-outcomes-for-children-3>

## Improving outcomes in public health

Being in a stable couple relationship is strongly associated with improvements in health and mental wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Research shows that adults in poor quality and distressed relationships are three times as likely to suffer from mood disorders<sup>7</sup> and more than twice as likely to suffer from anxiety disorders. These adults are also more likely to engage in behaviour which is harmful to their physical health.<sup>8</sup>

The relationship charity Relate estimate there are almost three million people in distressed relationships across the UK which is one in five adults in couple relationships.<sup>9</sup>

The Relationships Alliance describe improvements in relationship quality as the 'missing link' in public health.<sup>10</sup> Equipping young people with the skills to maintain a healthy relationship in adulthood has long term public health benefits and should be recognised as an important factor in better long term public health outcomes.

Helping young people master relationships and become relationally literate adults can help to address long term social policy challenges.

6 [https://tavistockrelationships.ac.uk/images/uploads/Relationships\\_-\\_the\\_missing\\_link\\_in\\_public\\_health\\_-\\_report\\_from\\_the\\_Relationships\\_Alliance.pdf](https://tavistockrelationships.ac.uk/images/uploads/Relationships_-_the_missing_link_in_public_health_-_report_from_the_Relationships_Alliance.pdf)

7 [https://www.relate.org.uk/sites/default/files/relationships\\_alliance\\_submission\\_to\\_2017\\_manifestos\\_-\\_supporting\\_evidence.pdf](https://www.relate.org.uk/sites/default/files/relationships_alliance_submission_to_2017_manifestos_-_supporting_evidence.pdf)

8 Ibid

9 <https://www.relate.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/2016/5/24/287-million-people-across-uk-distressed-relationships>

10 <http://www.oneplusone.org.uk/blog/research-and-policy-updates-from-our-relationship-support-alliance-partners-june-2013>

## What Young People Told Us

The Centre for Social Justice and Family Stability Network commissioned an opinion poll of young people aged 14-17 in England to understand their views on changes to the provision of Relationships and Sex Education. This survey was conducted by Survation between 13th-15th December 2017. Survation polled 1,011 young people aged 14-17 living in England and weighted the results to provide a representative sample of opinion. Full results including methodology can be found in **Appendix 1**.

- RSE should reflect the ambitions of young people, not just the here and now: **72 per cent** wanted relationship education to help them understand how to build long term, lasting relationships as an adult.

Young people want Relationships Education to help them understand how to build a long term, lasting relationship as an adult. The legislation requires schools to teach young people about the impact of relationships on health and the characteristics of healthy or unhealthy relationships but when we polled young people aged 14 - 17 about these aims and their relationship goals, they felt being helped to understand how to build long term, lasting relationships was just as important.



- Achieving a lasting relationship in adult life is just as important to young people as their career ambitions: **Almost eighty per cent (78 per cent)** of 14-17 year olds in England think a long term, lasting relationship in adult life is just as important (or even more important) to them than their career ambitions.

We invest heavily in careers advice for young people but they aspire to a lasting relationship just as much as a good job.

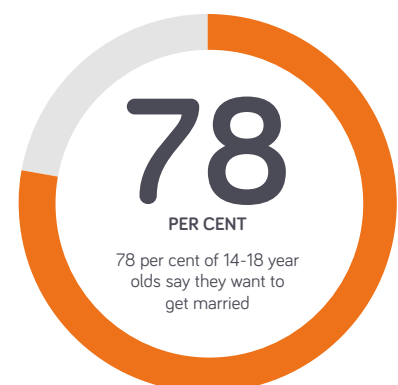


- Despite growing up in the shadow of widespread family breakdown, achieving a lasting relationship as an adult is still important to older teenagers: A long term, lasting relationship in adult life is important or very important to **77 per cent** of teenagers.

Relationships Education needs to reflect this aspiration, it isn't just about better relationships today. Young people are ambitious for lasting relationships as adults despite more than half of young people growing up with experience of their own family breaking up.

- Young people want to get married as adults, RSE shouldn't ignore marriage: **Eight in ten (78 per cent)** teenagers (aged 14-17) want to get married. Only 4 per cent of teenagers rule it out completely.

Not only do young people want a lasting relationship in adult life, they aspire to get married. Relationships Education shouldn't ignore the word 'marriage' and the ambition of young people to get married as adults.



- **There is a long way to go in understanding why marriage matters:** When we asked young people if they agreed or disagreed with the statement 'being married is no different to just living together' **41 per cent** agreed while **39 per cent** disagreed.

Young people are evenly split when it comes to understanding the important role of marriage as more than just another kind of relationship. This confusion should be addressed by a more ambitious approach to RSE in schools and online. There is a long way to go in supporting young people in their ambition to get married and understanding why it is important.



- **RSE needs to go beyond the classroom:** More than half of young people (**58 per cent**) are looking for relationship information and advice online. Young people are least likely to go to a teacher for advice (**29 per cent**).

More than four out of ten (**42 per cent**) teenagers are clear there isn't enough good information and advice online.

Despite all the time spent online 'real life' conversations with friends and parents remain important with **72 per cent** telling us they go to friends in person for advice and **66 per cent** saying they were likely to talk to their parents.

Improved online provision needs to go beyond the classroom and help young people and parents have better real life conversations

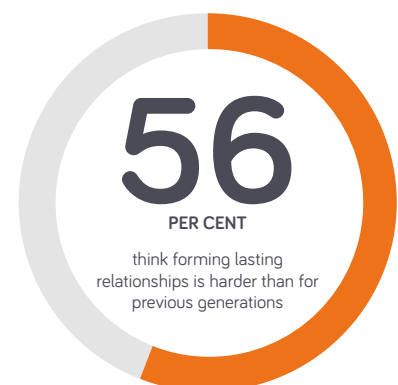


- **Achieving their relationship goals is harder than ever for young people:** A majority (**56 per cent**) of young people think that forming a lasting relationship is harder now than it was for previous generations.

We need to do more to help young people achieve their aim of a long term, lasting relationship in adult life. The need to promote the ingredients of stability has never been more important or urgent.

- **The views of boys and young men:** In June 2017 The Family Stability Network (FASTN) commissioned an opinion poll of young men aged 16-19 to understand the views of boys and their attitudes towards relationships. The full results of this survey can be found in the Love, Lust and Loneliness report.<sup>11</sup>

This survey reveals a cohort of young men who want to do the right thing but are seeking help and guidance to have better relationships.



<sup>11</sup> [https://fastn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/LLL-Report\\_-\\_web.pdf](https://fastn.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/LLL-Report_-_web.pdf)



- Young men want a lasting relationship in adult life but they don't think they will achieve it: **87 per cent** of 16 - 19 year old men eventually want to end up in a long term relationship with **93 per cent** expecting to marry at some point. However **four in ten** say that they like the idea of a lasting relationship but can't see themselves being with one person long term. Relationships Education which focuses on the ingredients of a long lasting, adult relationship can help young men achieve their ambitions.
- There is a role for relationship education that isn't just about sex: **Eight out of ten** of the young men surveyed cited at least one concern or problem in a relationship they had experienced where they would have valued better advice or support.
- Young men need help to understand what makes a healthy relationship and how to put theory into practice: Almost half of young men aged 16-19 (**46 per cent**) have carried on a relationship they wanted to finish and **45 per cent** have felt ashamed of the way they've treated a partner.
- Relationship Education needs to help young people talk about relationships and resolve conflict: A **quarter** of young men said they wanted help resolving conflict and a **fifth** wanted to be better at talking about relationship issues with a partner. A **third** of young men felt they could talk to their partner about almost anything but not how the relationship was going.



# Recommendations

## 1. An Innovation Fund for Relationships and Sex Education Delivered Online

A modern approach to relationships education cannot simply be delivered within the classroom. A report by Ofcom in 2017 found that a typical 12-15 year old spends almost a day a week (21 hours) online and more than 8 in 10 have access to a smartphone<sup>12</sup>.

The way young people receive information and go looking for it has changed and RSE provision needs to reflect this. Research conducted for this submission found that almost six in ten older teenagers go looking for relationship information and advice online<sup>13</sup>. Young people are least likely to go to a teacher for advice (**29 per cent**). More than forty per cent of older teenagers (**42 per cent**)<sup>14</sup> are clear there isn't enough good information and advice online.

Despite all the time spent online 'real life' conversations with friends and parents remain important to young people<sup>15</sup>. Going beyond the classroom with better online provision needs to help young people and parents to have better real life conversations.

Online provision will also help to deliver consistency. Ofsted reported in 2013 that Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) provision required improvement in over a third of all schools<sup>16</sup>. Another survey found that up to a quarter of young people do not receive any SRE in school (and of those who do, a quarter say their teacher is not able to teach it well) and one-fifth of young people on average rate their SRE as poor<sup>17</sup>. The provision of 'kite marked' online information and guidance would increase the reach of high quality and consistent RSE alongside classroom delivery.

With this in mind the government should consider how high-quality relationship information and advice could be delivered online as well as in the classroom. Relationships and Sex Education needs to go beyond the classroom if it is to make an impact with young people.

**Recommendation:** When the Secretary of State launches new guidance on Relationships and Sex Education in schools the Department for Education should also announce a new dedicated Innovation Fund to encourage the development of 'kite marked' online information and guidance. A Department for Education launched Innovation Fund would ensure there is high quality online provision for young people and parents to receive information alongside classroom based RSE.

12 [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0020/108182/children-parents-media-use-attitudes-2017.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/108182/children-parents-media-use-attitudes-2017.pdf)

13 Survation survey of 1,011 children aged 14-17 in England, 13th - 15th December 2017

14 Ibid

15 Ibid

16 Ofsted, Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools, Manchester: Ofsted, 2013, p6

17 Brook, UK sex and relationships education fails to prepare young people for modern day life, Press Release, 12 October 2011; UK Youth Parliament, SRE: Are You Getting It?, London: UK Youth Parliament, 2007, p4

**Case Study: Status**

Status was launched in 2016 to help young people understand what it means to be in a healthy relationship. Status seeks to engage young people in conversation about healthy relationships.

Status responds to a growing demand for better relationship information delivered online and through social media and believes in helping young people think through their relationships with engaging and informative content.

Through StatusOnline.org young people share relationship stories, reflect on their own experiences and get information on how to make relationships work. Status uses content created and designed by young people to ensure it has an authentic voice. Status is all about engaging young people in a conversation about healthy relationships across social media and through StatusOnline.org.

Since its launch Status has reached over half a million young people and every week reaches more than 140,000 16-25 year olds through social media.

## 2. Developing Relationships Skills for Adulthood

Young people overwhelmingly aspire to long term, lasting relationships in their adult lives. However research conducted by the educational charity Explore Relationships found fewer than five per cent of young people have ever had the opportunity to discuss their relationships with an adult in school or at home<sup>18</sup>.

The aspiration among older teenagers for a lasting relationship in adult life is set against a backdrop of widespread family breakdown where half of these teenagers will have seen their own parents' relationship break up and 1 in 5 children will have witnessed domestic abuse at home.

Through the teaching of relationship skills in school, Relationships Education can help to 'normalise' discussions around relationship health and how to address problems within relationships increasing the uptake of relationship support later on in life.

Relationships Education should equip young people with better relationship skills and knowledge to achieve long lasting, healthier relationships today and in the future.

The concept of commitment is fundamental to understanding how to maintain a healthy relationship and understanding how problems can develop. It is an important concept in helping young people to navigate their own early experiences of relationship formation and understanding how to form healthy adult relationships. Recent evidence on reducing teen dating violence shows that engaging in conversations around commitment can help to increase understanding about healthy relationships<sup>19</sup>.

The teaching of commitment as a relational concept should include:

- i. Reliable indicators of commitment
- ii. The risks of persistent ambiguity about commitment
- iii. The dangers and consequences associated with 'asymmetric commitment' (including how to end such relationships); and
- iv. How commitment supports relationship stability (including how to work through difficulties)

Research shows that clearly understood and communicated commitment can help to strengthen a relationship but it can also increase the risks within a relationship when it is not understood or clearly expressed. This is described as 'asymmetric commitment'<sup>20</sup> which refers to the process where couples misunderstand levels of commitment to a relationship and where one partner has a significantly higher commitment than the other.

A recent evidence review on relationship formation has established the link between higher levels of commitment and the willingness of either partner to work through problems, respond constructively to negative behaviour and resist 'attractive alternatives' to the relationship. This research demonstrates how clearly expressed and shared commitment not only improves relationship quality but also increases long term stability<sup>21</sup>.

Historically young couples developed clearly understood steps (such as 'going steady') which gave each partner a clear language to understand the seriousness of their relationship and allowed both partners to be more confident that they had a similar level of commitment to each other.

The modern relationship environment with its complexities and ambiguities makes it harder for young people to distinguish seriousness and leaves them poorly equipped to make clear expressions of commitment to each other.

18 <https://www.explorerelationships.org.uk/>

19 [www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/248464.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/248464.pdf)

20 Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Scott, S. B., Kelmer, G., Markman, H. J., & Fincham, F. D. (2016). Asymmetrically committed relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*

21 Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Whitton, S. W. (2010). "Commitment: Functions, Formation, and the Securing of Romantic Attachment", *J Fam Theory Rev.* 2010 December 1; 2(4): 243–257

Research identifies reliable indicators of commitment as “common day-to-day behaviours that often called for putting aside personal interest for the sake of the partner or relationship.” Such actions are known to be an important dimension through which partners communicate about the relationship and the degree to which one can trust the other to ‘be there’ for them<sup>22</sup>.

Recent research has also identified a ‘preference for ambiguity in the relationships of [young] adults’ as a flawed strategy for minimising the emotional impact of relationship break down<sup>23</sup>.

Clearly expressed commitment strengthens attachment within a relationship. Ambiguity, however, increases the risks of asymmetrically committed relationships which research shows to be characterised by higher levels of negativity and aggression, and reduced stability<sup>24</sup>.

Research into the formation of relationships increasingly divides commitment into two forms ‘dedication’ and ‘constraint’<sup>25 26</sup>. Young people should understand these terms and their importance for developing a relationship.

**Dedication** is positive because it motivates romantic connection. Dedication is an emotional form of commitment - a bond that makes a couple want to be with each other. **Constraint commitment** refers to the increased costs (both emotional and financial) of leaving a relationship. Highly constrained relationships with little dedication are extremely unhealthy.

Dedication is the key to a successful relationship, centring on the mutual decision to be a couple with a future. Constraints increase in a relationship every time couples pass through a transition, such as moving in together, having a baby, or getting married. Constraints are often referred to as ‘premature entanglement’.

Couples who ‘slide’ through transitions tend to increase constraints without necessarily increasing dedication. Couples who ‘decide’ through transitions are increasing dedication before adding constraints. The timing of building dedication before adding constraints is an important factor in developing a healthy adult relationship and avoiding an unhealthy one which is difficult to leave. Understanding how a healthy (or unhealthy) relationship develops is important knowledge which should be clearly understood.

The concept of **Sliding versus Deciding** was originally set out by American academic Professor Scott Stanley. Stanley defines “deciding” as making a clear mutual decision before taking any big step forward in a relationship. “Sliding” into a relationship through inertia creates a potentially vulnerable situation where a relationship is harder to get out of and increases the risk of high conflict separation<sup>27</sup>.

Stanley sets out how ‘inertia’ in relationships through sliding increases constraints within a relationship and can make it more difficult to end that relationship. By ‘deciding’ instead of ‘sliding’, individuals reduce the risk of being constrained within a relationship which is harder to get out of and with someone of limited or no compatibility<sup>28</sup>.

Couples who ‘slide’ through transitions tend to increase ‘constraints’ without necessarily increasing ‘dedication’. Couples who ‘decide’ through transitions are increasing ‘dedication’ before adding ‘constraints’<sup>29</sup>.

Research in this area promotes the importance of thoughtful and clear relationship decision-making which helps to increase dedication and strengthen relationships alongside adding constraints<sup>30</sup>.

22 Stanley, S. M., Whitton, S. W., Low, S. M., Clements, M. L., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sacrifice as a predictor of marital outcomes. *Family Process*, 45, 289-303 and Wieselquist, J., Rusbult, C. E., Foster, C. A., & Agnew, C. R. (1999). ‘Commitment, pro-relationship behavior, and trust in close relationships’. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 77, 942-966.

23 Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2011). Understanding romantic relationships among emerging adults: The significant roles of cohabitation and ambiguity. In F. D. Fincham & M. Cui (Eds.), *Romantic relationships in emerging adulthood* (pp. 234-251). New York: Cambridge University Press

24 Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., Scott, S. B., Kelmer, G., Markman, H. J., & Fincham, F. D. (2016). Asymmetrically committed relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*.

25 Stanley S, Kline G & Markham H (2006a), Sliding vs Deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499-509

26 Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54, 595-608

27 Rhoades, G., Stanley, S., & Markman, H. (2012). A longitudinal investigation of commitment dynamics in cohabiting relationships. *Journal of Family Issues*, 33, 369-390

28 Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding versus deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499-509

29 Kline, et al (2004). Timing is everything: pre engagement cohabitation and increased risk for poor marital outcomes. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 18, 311

30 Stanley, S. M., Rhoades, G. K., & Markman, H. J. (2006). Sliding vs. Deciding: Inertia and the premarital cohabitation effect. *Family Relations*, 55, 499 - 509

Healthy relationships are characterised by a comparatively high degree of dedication whereas unhealthy relationships are held together by constraints<sup>31</sup>. 'Deciding' instead of 'sliding' can minimise the risk of pursuing a relationship in which constraint outweighs dedication.

Deciding enables partners to ensure higher and more equal levels of dedication. Couples who decide are more likely to engage in discussions about Compatibility (e.g. shared values), Expectations (e.g. work or home responsibilities) and Meaning (e.g. the degree of dedication cohabitation signifies for either partner)<sup>32</sup>.

**Recommendation:** New statutory guidance on Relationships and Sex Education should make a clear distinction between Sex Education and Relationships Education. Relationships Education should help older teenagers understand how clear commitment, good communication and being able to resolve conflict set the foundations for a successful relationship<sup>33</sup>.

### Case Study: Romance Academy

The Romance Academy is a ten week programme delivered by the children's charity Youthscape and encourages young people to reflect on what makes for a healthy relationship.

Research conducted by the Romance Academy found that 81% of young people they interviewed felt overwhelmed by the pressure placed on them to become sexually active. The Romance Academy has a strong ethos of empowering young people to manage their relationships and help young people develop the relationship skills to build healthier relationships in the future.

The Romance Academy programme is run over ten sessions each focusing on a specific relationship topic. Each session is designed to empower young people to build healthier relationships. The programme inspires positive risk taking and helps the young people nurture their future aspirations giving them the knowledge and relationships skills to build committed relationships and make informed choices that equip them to think and act in ways that benefits themselves and others.

The first few sessions focus on discussing topics such as identity, consent and gender and help young people develop their own values and take responsibility for their behaviour to promote personal self-worth, respect and safety. Later sessions deal with topics such as life choices, sexual health and participants' future goals helping young people to make informed choices, explore positive family life and develop their relationship goals.

Discussing these issues in small, safe groups helps the young people to reflect and develop their relationship literacy. The Romance Academy is constantly evolving to reflect the real life of today's teenagers. Two thirds of teenagers surveyed by the Romance Academy following their ten week course said they felt better equipped to face relationship challenges and a higher sense of self-worth and confidence in managing future relationships.

31 Stanley, S. M., & Markman, H. J. (1992). Assessing commitment in personal relationships. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 54, 595-608

32 Harmon-Jones, E., & Harmon-Jones, C. (2002). Testing the action based model of cognitive dissonance: The effect of action orientation on post decisional attitudes. *Personality of Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 711-723.

28 Fincham et al (2007). Transformative processes in marriage: an analysis of emerging trends. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 69, 275-292

### 3. Marriage is not ‘just another type of relationship’

Opinion polling of young people consistently shows a long term aspiration to get married. When we asked young people about their long term relationship goals, almost eight in ten (78 per cent) of 14-17 year olds said they wanted to get married<sup>34</sup>. Previous opinion polling has shown that nine out of ten under 16s want to get married in the future<sup>35</sup>. The government should feel confident in reflecting this life ambition when it updates guidance on Relationships Education.

Despite a strong ambition among young people to get married there is still a long way to go in understanding why marriage matters. In our survey of young people aged 14-17, 41 per cent agreed that marriage was ‘no different to just living together’ while 39 per cent disagreed with this statement<sup>36</sup>. On current trends a child born today has a 50/50 chance of living with both birth parents by the time he or she is 15<sup>37</sup>, however nearly all parents (93 per cent) who stay together until their children reach their 15th birthday are married<sup>38</sup>.

It is important that the guidance on Relationships Education allows young people to reflect on the difference between cohabitation and marriage without stigmatising those children who are growing up with different family forms at home.

Cohabitation, rather than divorce is the main driver of family breakdown in the UK today with the separation of unmarried parents accounting for the majority (51 per cent) of family breakdown despite these parents accounting for 21 per cent of all couples<sup>39</sup>.

An international comparison survey published last year showed that UK children born to cohabiting parents are 94 per cent more likely to see their parents break up before age 12, compared to children born to married parents<sup>40</sup>. New guidance should help older teenagers reflect on why marriage remains a popular relationship ambition and how it leads to long term stability.

Existing guidance and legislation on Sex and Relationships Education gives the government a basis for updated guidance in relation to marriage.

- Section 148 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000) requires the Secretary of State to ensure children “learn the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children”
- Existing guidance on Sex and Relationship Education (2000) is based on the 2000 Act and says: “...pupils should be taught about the nature and importance of marriage for family life and bringing up children” and “...pupils should learn the significance of marriage and stable relationships as key building blocks of community and society”

Older teenagers should be taught about the difference between cohabitation and marriage and helped to reflect on why marriage is different from other relationship forms if we are to help them achieve their long term relationship aspirations.

**Recommendation:** New statutory guidance should specifically refer to Marriage and help young people to reflect on why it is considered important. In particular statutory guidance should not omit the word ‘marriage’. The Secretary of State should ensure that statutory guidance contains a strong statement of support for marriage based on the existing guidance issued in 2000 and Section 148 of the Learning and Skills Act (2000).

34 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Family Stability Network Survey polling of 1,011 young people age 14-17 in England between 14-17 December 2017

35 Survey of 5,000 teenagers in Bliss magazine, March 2004

36 Centre for Social Justice (CSJ)/Family Stability Network Survey polling of 1,011 young people age 14-17 in England between 14-17 December 2017

37 <http://marriagefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Establishing-the-facts-about-family-breakdown-1.pdf>

38 Ibid

39 Ibid

40 <https://worldfamilymap.ifstudies.org/2017/files/WFM-2017-FullReport.pdf>

### Case Study: Explore

Explore is a relationships education charity, set up in 2000 which delivers workshops that help young people discuss, evaluate and explore long-term, positive, healthy relationships within the context of marriage. Explore allows young people to reflect on what makes a long-lasting relationship work through an open dialogue with real life married couples, reflecting on the relational skills needed to make a relationship last.

Every Explore session is young person led and managed by a professional Explore Local Development Officer. Research conducted by Explore has found fewer than 5 per cent of young people have had the opportunity to engage in a meaningful conversation about what makes a relationship work.

Young people attending Explore sessions are encouraged to ask questions and explore the challenges of a long lasting relationship. This process enables young people to build a better understanding of the components of a long lasting relationship in adult life and important relational skills required to make relationships work. Each session encourages young people to examine their personal aspirations and fears for their future relationships. More than 85 per cent of young people found their Explore sessions useful in helping them to reflect on the components of a long term lasting relationship in adult life and the relationship skills needed to achieve it.

Explore is not just limited to enabling young people to develop better lasting relationships in the future. The relational skills developed during the sessions help students to manage their everyday relationships better. The process of reflecting on what makes for a strong relationship helps students to invest in the relationships in which they are already involved.

Explore has reached over 90,000 young people in 180 schools since it started delivering individual workshops and half day programmes. Over 5,500 young people a year attend an Explore event.

[www.explorereationships.org.uk](http://www.explorereationships.org.uk)



## Appendix 1

### Summary Document: Survation Poll of Young People for the Centre for Social Justice

Sample size: **1,011 children aged 14 - 17 in England**

Fieldwork dates: **13<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> December, 2017**

Full tables can be found here - <https://goo.gl/RZKmtN>

Thinking about what you want your life to be like when you're an adult, which of the following statements is closest to your view?			
	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
My working life will be more important than having a long term, lasting relationship	17%	17%	17%
Having a long term, lasting relationship will be more important than my working life	13%	14%	11%
I think both will be equally important	66%	64%	68%
Don't know	5%	6%	4%

How important do you think a long term, lasting relationship will be to you in adult life?			
	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
A long-term, lasting relationship will be very important to me in adult life	41%	40%	42%
A long-term, lasting relationship will be quite important to me in adult life	36%	35%	39%
A long-term, lasting relationship will not be very important to me in adult life	8%	8%	8%
A long-term, lasting relationship will not be important at all to me in adult life	6%	6%	6%
Don't know	9%	11%	6%

Which of the following statements is closest to your view?*			
	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
I definitely want to get married at some point in my life	35%	31%	39%
I probably want to get married at some point in my life	43%	45%	42%
I probably don't want to get married at some point in my life	9%	9%	9%
I definitely don't want to get married at any point in my life	4%	4%	4%
Don't know	10%	12%	7%

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Being married is no different to just living together”?

	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
Strongly + somewhat agree	41%	44%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	14%	14%	13%
Strongly + somewhat disagree	39%	35%	42%
Don't know	6%	7%	6%

The Government is reviewing relationship education in schools. Thinking about what this relationship education could include, how much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

	SOMEWHAT + STRONGLY AGREE	NEITHER AGREE NOR DISAGREE	SOMEWHAT + STRONGLY DISAGREE	DON'T KNOW
Relationship education should help young people like me understand how to build long term, lasting relationships as an adult	72%	20%	5%	3%
Relationship education should help young people like me understand the characteristics of a healthy relationship and what an unhealthy relationship looks like	79%	15%	3%	2%
Relationship education should help young people like me understand how relationships can affect my physical and mental health	78%	15%	4%	3%

If you wanted information and advice on relationships, how likely would you be to do each of the following?

	SOMEWHAT + VERY LIKELY (SUMMED)	NEITHER LIKELY NOR UNLIKELY	SOMEWHAT + VERY UNLIKELY (SUMMED)	DON'T KNOW
Search for advice and information online, for example through Google or YouTube	58%	22%	17%	3%
Talk to friends for information and advice in person	72%	17%	8%	3%
Talk to friends for information and advice over social media, like Facebook or Snapchat	53%	23%	22%	3%
Talk to parents for information and advice	66%	18%	14%	2%
Talk to other family members for information and advice	52%	24%	21%	3%
Talk to a school teacher or other adult for information and advice	29%	26%	41%	3%

The Government is reviewing relationship and sex education in schools. Regarding advice and information that can be accessed online, which of the following is closest to your view?

	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
There is enough good relationship advice and information online for people my age	29%	32%	27%
There is not enough good relationship advice and information online for people my age	42%	37%	48%
Don't know	28%	31%	26%

How much do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Forming a long term, healthy relationship that lasts will be harder for my generation than for previous generations"?

	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
Strongly + somewhat agree	56%	55%	58%
Neither agree nor disagree	27%	28%	26%
Strongly + somewhat disagree	9%	8%	11%
Don't know	8%	10%	6%

If you needed relationship advice, which of the following would you be more likely to do?

	ALL	MALE	FEMALE
Talk to an adult, like a teacher or parent	44%	41%	48%
Search for advice and information online, for example through Google or YouTube	33%	34%	33%
Neither	11%	12%	10%
Don't know	12%	14%	10%



### About the Family Stability Network

The Family Stability Network (FASTN) brings together individuals and organisations committed to reversing family breakdown in the UK. FASTN is focused on changing attitudes and behaviour through online and social media campaigns to help people to build healthy relationships that last. FASTN launched the online Status platform in 2016.



### About the Centre for Social Justice

Established in 2004, the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) seeks to put social justice at the heart of British politics. The CSJ is an independent think tank that studies the root causes of Britain's social problems and addresses them by recommending practical, workable policy interventions. The majority of the CSJ's work is organised around five 'pathways to poverty', first identified in our ground-breaking 2007 report, Breakthrough Britain. These are: family breakdown; educational failure; economic dependency and worklessness; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and severe personal debt.

The Family Policy Unit was established in the summer of 2017 within the Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) to promote the role of families within government policy making. The Unit is led by Frank Young and supported by the policy team at the CSJ.