

## Children's permission required before parents can view their medical records

**Medical practitioners are denying parents access to their children's health records in the name of preserving the rights of the child to confidentiality. Following the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) at the end of May, many GP surgeries have reviewed their data protection policies and are insisting on securing the consent of children as young as 11 or 12 before they will allow their parents to view their records.**

According to updated guidance from the British Medical Association (BMA):

*Where a child is considered capable of making decisions about access to his or her medical record, the consent of the child must be sought before a parent or other third party can be given access via a SAR [subject access request].<sup>1</sup>*

The BMA guidance states that, while children under 16 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland must demonstrate that they have sufficient understanding of what is proposed in order to be entitled to make or consent to a subject access request, 'children who are aged 12 or over are generally expected to have the competence to give or withhold their consent to the release of information from their health records'. In Scotland, anyone aged 12 or over is legally presumed to have such competence.

Other BMA guidance on confidentiality and disclosure of health information stresses that 'every reasonable effort must be made to persuade the child to involve parents or guardians particularly for important or life-changing decisions'. However, it is equally emphatic that the child must have the final word: health professionals should 'respect the child's wishes if they do not want parents or guardians to know'.<sup>2</sup>

### GDPR

Article 8 of the GDPR states that where 'information society services' (i.e. online services) are offered directly to a child, the processing of the child's personal data is only lawful where the child is aged 16 or over. The regulation goes on to state that: 'Where the child is below the age of 16 years, such processing shall be lawful only if and to the extent that consent is given or authorised by the holder of parental responsibility over the child.' But Article 8 then adds that, 'Member States may provide by law for a lower age for those purposes provided

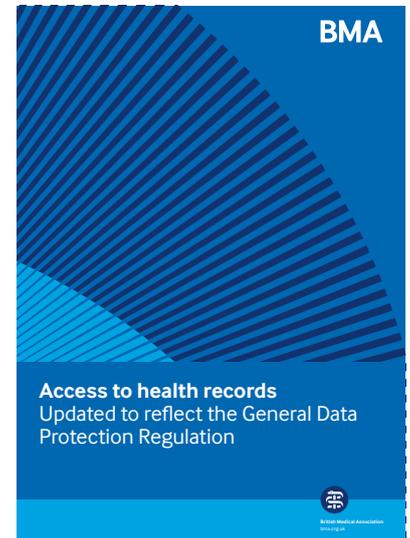
that such lower age is not below 13 years.'<sup>3</sup>

Under section 9 of the Data Protection Act 2018, the UK government has legislated to allow children aged 13 or over to consent to their data being processed by providers of online services. The explanatory notes observe that:

*This is in line with the minimum age set as a matter of contract by some of the most popular information society services which currently offer services to children (e.g. Facebook, Whatsapp, Instagram). This means children aged 13 and above would not need to seek consent from a guardian when accessing, for example, information society services which provide educational websites and research resources to complete their homework.<sup>4</sup>*

The UK legislation goes on to stipulate that the reference to 'information society services' does not include preventive or counselling services. The explanatory notes accordingly state that:

*As long as a child is capable of understanding the processing to which they are consenting and is capable of making a free and informed decision, then it is considered that the child is capable of*



**The BMA has published updated guidance on Access to health records to reflect GDPR**

*consenting to any processing of personal data.<sup>5</sup>*

### RCGP guidance

According to guidance from the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP), it is normal for parents to control access to their child's medical record and online services until the child's 11<sup>th</sup> birthday. But the guidance states that when the child reaches the age of 11, 'access to the detailed care record should be switched off automatically' in order to avoid the possibility of:

1. Sudden withdrawal of proxy access by the practice alerting the parents to the possibility that the child or young person has been to the practice about something that they wish to remain private, an example may be family planning advice, or
2. The young person being deterred from coming to the practice for help.<sup>6</sup>

**continued overleaf...**

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The guidance does allow for the possibility that parental proxy access may be reinstated if the child's GP believes it to be in the child's best interest, but even then, between the ages of 11-16, parents will not be able to see the young person's past appointments or clinical record. Specific reference is made to the need to protect 'the small number of children and young people who could be at serious risk of harm from their family if medical information (such as use of the contraceptive pill) is inadvertently disclosed'.<sup>7</sup>

To assist medical practices in negotiating the data protection minefield, the RCGP suggests three possible ways of working:

- They could limit access to patients over 18 with exceptions only on a case-by-case basis;
- They could limit access to patients over 16 with exceptions on a case-by-case basis; or
- They could make decisions over whether to give parents or guardians access to records of 12-16 year old patients on a case-by-case basis.<sup>8</sup>

### Denying access to all

In a GDPR update addressed to all medical practices in its area, the Surrey and Sussex Local Medical Committee suggests that 'GP practices may not feel it is a current priority to promote independent online access for under 16 year-olds'.<sup>9</sup> In order to avoid the administrative headache of determining which 11-16 year-olds are competent to independently access their own medical records, some practices have accordingly decided that access should be denied to both parents

and their children.

One practice has accordingly informed patients:

*This is to advise you that in accordance with new guidelines, online access to medical records will not be available for children after their 11th birthday and until they reach 16 years old, when they may request their own online access. If you currently have access (either directly or as a parent/guardian), access will now be removed. We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause.*

Other practices are content to grant access to 'Gillick competent' children, while excluding their parents unless they have the explicit consent of the child. The term 'Gillick competent' is derived from a 1985 House of Lords judgment against Victoria Gillick, in which Lord Fraser ruled that, subject to certain criteria, contraception could be provided to children under the age of 16 without the knowledge and consent of their parents. Lord Fraser emphasised that:

*Nobody doubts, certainly I do not doubt, that in the overwhelming majority of cases the best judges of a child's welfare are his or her parents. Nor do I doubt that any important medical treatment of a child under 16 would normally only be carried out with the parents' approval. That is why it would and should be most unusual for a doctor to advise a child without the knowledge and consent of parents on contraceptive matters.*<sup>10</sup>

Within a short space of time, Lord Fraser's comments on contraceptive provision were seized on and extended to other areas of children's lives, and what he viewed as an exception swiftly became the rule. We have been left with a strange disjuncture between the responsibility of parents for all aspects of the care

and nurture of their children on the one hand, and the right of the child to confidentiality and autonomy on the other.

### Unintended consequences

There is already a strong body of evidence that the confidential provision of contraception to under-16s has resulted in negative unintended consequences, and the Brooke Serious Case Review into Child Sexual Exploitation specifically noted that,

*The confusion created by national guidance on patient confidentiality, data protection and legal rights appears to get in the way of keeping child safeguarding as the most paramount consideration.*<sup>11</sup>

Serious questions remain to be answered about the way in which confidentiality policies are not only damaging children, but are also militating against optimal parenting.

The fact remains that parents continue to bear the legal responsibility for caring for their children and attending to their needs, including making sure that their medical needs are met. If they are adjudged to be failing in their duties, they can be charged with neglect. And yet, if parents are denied access to vital information about their children's lives, how can they be expected to discharge their responsibilities? In the absence of a complete picture of the needs of their children, parents will not be in a position to promote their welfare in the most appropriate and efficient manner.

### Notes

1. BMA, *Access to health records: Updated to reflect the General Data Protection Regulation*, May 2018.
2. BMA, *Confidentiality and disclosure of health information tool kit*, June 2016.
3. General Data Protection Regulation, article 8, <https://gdpr-info.eu/art-8-gdpr/>
4. Data Protection Act 2018, Explanatory Notes, para 89.
5. *Ibid.*, para 91.
6. RCGP, *Online services: Proxy Access on behalf of Children and Young People, Guidance for general practice*, December 2015.
7. *Ibid.*
8. RCGP, *Online services: Records Access Getting ready checklist, step-by-step guide*, March 2016.
9. Surrey and Sussex Local Medical Committee, 'GDPR Update: GDPR and online access to records by children', 22 May 2018.
10. *Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority and another* - [1985] 3 All ER 402.
11. Cited in Norman Wells, *Unprotected*, Family Education Trust, 2017.

## Medical information 'automatically withheld from parents'?

**After receiving data protection training arranged by a local clinical commissioning group, at least two practices advised its young patients that:**

*Now or when you have reached the age of 13, the law states that your medical information is automatically withheld from your parents/guardian. Only you have the ability to change this by completing a consent form...*

In reality, 'the law' says nothing of the kind, but when Family Education Trust queried this assertion with the practices, both insisted that 'It's in the GDPR' and 'You'll find it on the Information Commissioner's website.'

But after further investigation, the practice managers admitted that that they were going 'beyond the requirements of the GDPR'. The letters were retracted and an apology sent to patients.

The fact that the letters were sent in the first place not only demonstrates the considerable confusion surrounding GDPR, but it also reflects a climate in which parents are increasingly viewed as an irrelevance to the lives and major decisions of their children.

## Digging in for the long haul

David Quinn of the Iona Institute reflects on the Irish referendum on abortion

*'The State acknowledges the right to life of the unborn and, with due regard to the equal right to life of the mother, guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate that right.'*

**Eighth Amendment of the Constitution of Ireland**

The eighth amendment was designed to recognise the equal right to life of the mother and the unborn child, and Ireland has a lower maternal death rate than the UK. But now, following a huge propaganda campaign, the Irish electorate has voted for repeal, by a majority of 66.4 per cent to 33.6 per cent – roughly the same majority who voted in favour of putting the eighth amendment into the constitution back in 1983.

Few people in Ireland are conscious of the scale of abortion in the UK. They are unaware of the fact that for every four births in the UK there is one abortion, and that 90 per cent of Down's babies are aborted. Our task is to pull individuals out of the culture of death, to rescue casualties, to put down a marker and to stand as witnesses to a different way of thinking.

When the eighth amendment was decisively passed in 1983, the pro-choice side did not disappear. They fought to get to the point where they are now. It took 35 years. It is now our turn to dig in for the long haul. The pro-life side has to change Ireland back into a society that protects the right to life of the unborn, even if that takes decades. It is a moral duty.

### True compassion

In an article published in the *Sunday Times* shortly after the Irish referendum, David Quinn wrote:

*The great horror of liberal societies is the unchosen burden: we believe we have a near absolute right to cast aside anything unchosen. Therefore, if you did not want to become pregnant, and it has happened at a bad time in your life, you can opt for an abortion... We're told this makes us more compassionate. I'm not convinced. I'd have thought a more compassionate society takes care of its unwanted burdens, whether they be young, elderly or sick...*

*There is a real danger that all voices of dissent will now be crushed. Even media columnists are popping up on social media basically demanding that the 'enemies of progress' be silenced once and for all.*

*We can only hope that genuine liberals will stop them, because every society needs its dissenting voices. We needed them when Catholicism was the dominant orthodoxy of this country, and we need them again now that a liberal-left ideology is replacing it...*

*This is not a time to fold up our tents and go home. The stakes are far too high to allow this to become the settled law, and the unchallenged moral and social dispensation of our land.*

*Despite the vote on Friday, it remains true that the unborn child is a member of the human family and has a right to life. The unborn child should not be killed. It is wrong in itself to do that. Laws can be unjust, and a law that permits abortion, that withdraws the right to life from unborn human beings, is an unjust one, by definition.*

● **David Quinn, 'Unborn have no voice, so how could they win? - Liberal-left orthodoxy in politics and media ensured referendum result', *Sunday Times*, 27 May 2018.**



## Gender identity issues and the implications of the Irish referendum for Northern Ireland

Mary Russell



Shortly after returning from last year's conference I took part in a BBC radio programme about the decision to ban announcements on the London Underground addressing passengers as 'Ladies and Gentlemen'. The other contributor claimed the phrase marginalised those who did not identify with their born gender and offended many others who felt their gender was fluid. It was a lively debate and I was informed, in a condescending way, that I was a 'CIS female'. To think that all this time I didn't even know that! Apparently it means that I identify with the sex I was assigned at birth.

Immediately I envisaged some sort of Grand Wizard with a magic wand prancing and dancing around the maternity wards of the UK, sprinkling stardust over the sleeping infants and assigning their gender on a whim. I managed to get the last word though and pointed out the phrase 'Ladies and Gentlemen' was perfect. If you are a man who identifies as a woman it should be acceptable, if you are a woman who identifies as a man it is equally appropriate, and it subsequently occurred to me that even if you consider yourself 'fluid', you can find solace in that little 'and' in the middle of the phrase.

Last summer, the Canadian PM, Justin Trudeau, told his Irish counterpart that abortion was 'a question of fundamental rights for women'. According to Trudeau, abortion should be presented as 'reproductive rights which are integral to women's rights which are human rights'. This strategy worked remarkably well. Campaigners for repeal of the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment in Ireland never mentioned the right to life. The unborn child was dismissed as a cluster of cells, and the 'right to choose' was paramount.

### Dark and ominous cloud

The referendum result in the Republic of Ireland has cast a dark and ominous cloud over the island of Ireland. The forces that lined up to repeal the Irish legislation, which has provided protection for both the life of the unborn child AND the mother, have now turned their evil eye to destroying Northern Ireland's pro-life position. There is still a strong, unbending voice for those 'alive and waiting to be born' in Northern Ireland, although the DUP is the only political party that upholds the fundamental right to life. That said, all 14 SDLP members of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council have issued a statement saying they are 'unapologetically pro-life' and against 'abortion on demand'.

If you want to see the real face of abortion campaigners then check out online footage of the jubilation, the chanting and dancing in the streets to celebrate the killing of the unborn. Have they no shame?

Abortion campaigners recently arranged for an 'abortion bus' to come to Belfast city centre. In an attempt to circumvent the law, they had a doctor from the Netherlands conducting 'consultations' via Skype and a robot dispensing the abortion pill. I have heard over and over from these campaigners that 'no woman chooses to have an abortion lightly', and yet there are photographs of a woman taking the abortion pill as part of a publicity stunt.

There are many challenges that lie ahead, but, continuing to draw inspiration from the example of Valerie Riches, we must keep fighting and never give up!

# Remembering Valerie Riches (1924-2018)

*Tributes to our Founder President and former Director, who passed away on 12 April, aged 93.*

## Commitment & devotion

**When I was first introduced to Family and Youth Concern, as it was then known, in 1993, Valerie Riches had been labouring on behalf of the family and the welfare of children and young people for over 20 years.**

She was already over the normal age for retirement, yet such was her commitment and devotion that she kept going, and when she did eventually stand down from the day-to-day running of the organisation, she maintained keen interest in the work, serving as a trustee and Founder President.

## Voice of sanity and clarity

Valerie was often a lone voice of sanity and clarity in a world of madness and confusion. She demonstrated great courage in standing up for attitudes and standards that had fallen out of vogue among those who prided themselves on being 'progressive'.

In addition to parliamentary campaigning, she wrote articles and letters to the press, authored pamphlets and booklets, contributed informed comment in the press and media and organised research projects. She spoke at conferences in 30 different countries across five continents. Her booklet, *Sex and Social Engineering*, went through several editions and was translated into a dozen languages. It remains in print in updated and expanded form under the title *Sex Education or Indoctrination?*

Through her tireless work, Valerie put fresh hope into despairing hearts. She

exerted a much-needed positive influence in the midst of social decay, and touched many lives throughout the world.

## Highly esteemed

It is not everyone who has an obituary in the *Daily Telegraph*, and fewer still are featured on BBC Radio 4's *The Last Word* programme. The fact that such honours have been accorded to Valerie is testimony to the esteem in which her work continues to be held.

Catholics and evangelicals don't agree on everything, but they have been united in paying tribute to her. Catholic Family News described Valerie as 'a great woman and an original thinker whose analytical work on the orchestrated attack on the family has been fundamental to its worldwide defence'. The Christian Institute said that she was 'extraordinary and inspirational', a 'strong campaigner for the family' – someone who was 'extremely passionate in her work, but also had time to encourage other campaigners'.

It has been an honour and privilege to have known and worked with Valerie over the past 25 years, and to have entered into the fruit of her labours since becoming a member of staff in 2000.

She demonstrated a rare depth of devotion, courage and determination in her leadership of the work over its first three decades. Those of us who have followed are grateful for the firm foundations that she laid and remain ever conscious of the fact that we are standing on her shoulders.

**Norman Wells**



## A formidable lady

**Valerie Riches was a unique lady. She had such insight as to what was going wrong with our society in the heady days of the sexual revolution and put her all in to trying to do something about it.**

She spent time producing resources which are still useful today, defending the family unit of one man and one woman and encouraging parents to defend their children by making a stand. Her booklet, *Sex and Social Engineering* was a real eye-opener to me. As a busy Mum it was short, readable and factual and gave meaning to all the social changes and behaviours which we were living through in society and with which I fundamentally disagreed. Valerie showed that it was a minority of people - a very organised, inter-disciplinary elite - who were pushing all of these changes.

She did a lot of hard work in the background, telephoning and speaking with parents who were up against the system, in an effort to try and change things and safeguard children. On one occasion, she arranged for me, as she did with other mothers, to travel to Paddington where she met us at the station and took us to Westbourne Film Studios. There, we had the opportunity to participate in the audience of a TV documentary on sex education giving opposing views to that of the invited guest speakers.

Valerie was a formidable lady on a par with Victoria Gillick and Mary Whitehouse but who mostly worked quietly in the background. Her legacy is the Family Education Trust, ensuring that the good work she initiated all those years ago is continued and expanded.



**Christine Hudson**

## Resisting pressure and keeping the light shining



**Arthur Cornell** spoke of the help he had received from Valerie Riches as a headteacher in the 80s and 90s. The materials which she had recommended had helped to ensure that there were no teenage pregnancies in his school. With her encouragement, Mr Cornell had resisted pressure from the school nurse to install condom dispensers. He had refused for three reasons: (i) it would have given young people permission to engage in sexual activity; (ii) it would have created an expectation; and (iii) it would have encouraged lawbreaking.



**Lynette Burrows** reflected on the enormous social changes that had taken place over the 93 years of Valerie Riches' life. 'Valerie represented people who uphold the culture,' she said. Cultures come and cultures go, but the family endures, and Valerie was one of those who kept the light shining for us all.

## Powerful arguments, measured speech

Around the late 1980s the Brook Advisory Centre announced its intention to set up shop in Belfast. The Brook clinic offered contraceptive and abortion advice to teenagers without parental knowledge or consent. They once proudly declared that the youngest client they had counselled was a girl of 11, adding 'we treated her no differently than any other client'.

It was this attitude to the young, their families, and the values that make a community strong and caring that threw together a group of people who instinctively didn't like what we were hearing.

It was then that I met Valerie. By that point, she had not only realised the damage that the Family Planning Association, the Brook clinics, Planned Parenthood, classroom sex education, abortion and values clarification lessons could do to society, but she had also traced the origins of this ideology. What Valerie uncovered was something of a shock to us.

Valerie came over to Northern Ireland and addressed various meetings across the province. We set up meetings with politicians, city councillors and took part in radio programmes. It was, without doubt, the reliability of Valerie's research that impressed everyone and strengthened us to press on.

Valerie confirmed that our instinctive response to the advances of Brook in Belfast was well-founded. We were now armed with powerful arguments against the movements that the Family Education Trust continues to fight against. We began to understand these anti-family, pro-abortion campaigns don't happen by accident; they are orchestrated, planned with precision and focussed.

### Measured manner

Yet there was something more than the excellent standard of her research that had an impact on us. There was her measured manner of speech that just rang true, the certainty with which she set out her arguments, the sense of hearing someone who was absolutely genuine.

Valerie's love for her own family, her experiences as a social worker and her conviction that many young lives are being blighted by early or casual sex were the driving forces behind her success. She never gave up, and for that we will be eternally grateful.

*Mary Russell*

## My mentor and my friend

The first time I heard Valerie Riches' voice was at a Life Conference in the mid 90s. I couldn't see her face in that vast arena but her message reached my ears loud and clear, though many years passed before I acted upon what I heard that day.

In 1999, my eldest child started secondary school. During the first few weeks of the Autumn term, the school advised parents that it was commencing a 'confidential service for pupils' This 'service' was a contraception clinic. Parents had not been included in the decision-making process and had been completely undermined. I was sick with worry.

Then Valerie's speech came back to me. I managed to locate her and although she was on the cusp of retirement, she invited me into her home to discuss my concerns. It was immediately obvious I had met the right person. Valerie was an attentive listener and from that day on, she became my mentor and friend.

She taught me many things over the years. How to use the energy I spent worrying into positive action; how to ask the right questions. She told me that my strengths would emerge by 'keeping on keeping on'. I remember her raising her voice to me one day: 'Eileen! You've lost weight again, now STOP WORRYING!... It's about making your voice heard my dear,' she used to say, 'and raising awareness about what is happening in schools today. Turn that worrying into action!'

Valerie introduced me to the Family Education Trust, where I met like-minded people and found access to first class support. The Trust's work has continued to be a constant part of my life and I have made solid friends here, and all because of Valerie.

In later years, I visited Valerie often and I remember, when Denis had died, she told me that she felt an emptiness that could never be filled. Yet she did not dwell on her sadness but continued to be very interested in hearing news about everyone at the Trust and always about my family. She had a few local visitors popping in and she was a force to be reckoned with on the Scrabble table.

Latterly, as she became more frail, she would say: 'Eileen, why do you still come and see an old woman like me?' I would remind her of what she did for me; how she inspired me and what a fierce campaigner for the family she had been. Her eyes would light up on these occasions and she would answer: 'Did I really do all that?'

Isn't it apt that her surname was Riches because she has given me, and many others, riches galore! May her vision live on in the Trust for decades to come!

*Eileen Wojciechowska*

## A fighter and a wonderful teacher

**All of us who knew Valerie knew that she was a FIGHTER. In the decline of the family she saw a grave societal abuse, and she went into battle in the media and in the printed press to fight for the family based on marriage.**

Valerie saw very early on that contraceptive-oriented school sex education was one of the great enemies of the family. There were a number of sex education manuals in schools arguing that children must be given lots of facts (and contraceptives) so that they can make 'informed choices'. One of these manuals even said, 'Do not talk about marriage,' (ostensibly so as not to offend the sensibilities of children from broken homes or with same-sex parents). Valerie saw red and produced a list of statistics detailing how children with married parents did better in school, were less likely to suffer mental health problems, less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol, less likely to become homeless or engage in criminal behaviour. We toted these facts wherever and whenever we could.

Valerie saw the sexualisation of children as child abuse, spoiling childhood and jeopardising lasting relationships in adult life. She was tireless in her own endeavours and ruthless in sending us out whenever there was a forum for discussion.

She disliked many apparently respectable institutions and explained how they undermined the family. Above all, she saw the way that the state, in the form of social workers and family courts, was steadily taking over the ownership of children. To her, this was a mortal blow against the rights of parents and the family founded on marriage.

Valerie was a wonderful teacher, well-informed, kind and patient. Being convinced of her mission, she taught me and others many ways in which to discern an enemy of the family and to find good arguments.

*Cornelia Oddie  
Deputy Director, 1994-2000*



# The relentless march of the 'parental state'

An extract from the Director's report, delivered by Norman Wells at the Family Education Trust annual conference in central London on 9 June.

*'It is now the privilege of the Parental State to take major decisions – objective, unemotional, the State weighs up what is best for the child.'*<sup>1</sup>

These words of Lady Helen Brook, founder of the Brook Advisory Centres, which first appeared in a letter to the *Times* in 1980, were among Valerie Riches' favourite quotes.

I hasten to add that Valerie was not given to frequently citing such sentiments because she agreed with them. For the record, she fundamentally *disagreed* with them. But she would often recall them because they epitomise an ideology which has been embraced by people who wish to change social structures and replace parental influence with the authority of the state.

Almost 40 years on, that ideology remains alive and well in Westminster and Whitehall, in Cardiff and Edinburgh, and in town halls and civic centres across the length and breadth of the United Kingdom.

It expresses itself in the proposals of the Welsh and Scottish governments to pass laws that would make it a criminal offence for a parent to smack a child for bad behaviour. It is seen in the decision to prevent parents from withdrawing their children from statutory Relationships Education classes in English primary schools and plans to limit the right of parents to withdraw their children from Relationships and Sex Education classes in secondary schools.

But another more recent manifestation of the same ideology is found in the widespread suspicion of home educating parents.

## 'Breeding ground for extremists'

Last September, it was reported that Neil Basu, a senior police officer with the Metropolitan Police, had asserted that homeschooling is part of 'the breeding ground for extremists and future terrorists'.<sup>2</sup>

Mr Basu is the Senior National Co-ordinator for Counter Terrorism Policing and was speaking at the conference of the Police Superintendents Association, so his words carry some weight. We wrote to him and asked him to refer us to the evidence on which his assertion was based.

In reply, he said:

*'My point is that home schooling and unregulated places of education provide an opportunity for those with radical views and extremist mindsets to influence children. We have operational examples where this has happened which are sub*

*judice as the extremists have been charged.'*

OK, fair enough. He wasn't in a position to let us have any details, but could he give us the figures? Broken down by force, *how many* operational examples does he have of people with radical views and extremist mindsets using home education and unregulated places of education to influence children?

His reply was abrupt: 'Dear Mr Wells, No, I would not be willing to release the information.'

Am I being over-sensitive, or do I detect a certain attitude there? No reason given. Just an expression of unwillingness. He did say, though, that he would pass on our enquiry to be treated as a Freedom of Information request. By law, we should have received a reply within 20 working days, but it took more than four times that amount of time and a lot of chasing before we received our response.

Or, to be more precise, I should say we received a non-response, because the Police refused to release any of the information we had requested. They said that to give us the bare numbers we had requested – and that's *all* we had requested – 'would highlight...areas of vulnerability within the educational system' where children may be influenced, and that it would compromise national security and law enforcement!

And so a senior police officer can cast aspersions on home educating families by alleging that homeschooling is part of 'the breeding ground for extremists and future terrorists' without providing any evidence for his claims.

## Safeguarding checks

But it gets worse than that. At the end of April, the *Times* newspaper reported that police officers in the Durham area were



**Norman Wells**

conducting safeguarding checks on home educated children. According to the article, the parents of any child who is not in school and has not had contact with the police, local authority or GP in the previous 18 months can expect a knock on the door from the police.

The article went on to state that Simon Bailey, the national police spokesman for child protection, is urging police forces in other parts of the country to try a similar approach. And Robert Halfon, chairman of the House of Commons education select committee, said: 'The Durham project sounds ground-breaking and it's the sort of thing that should be replicated across the country.'<sup>3</sup>

After I read the *Times* article I called Durham Police and spoke to a senior officer there. I put it to him that home educating parents were being treated with a degree of suspicion not experienced by any other parents. For example, the police don't get involved in safeguarding checks on children under the age of 5 who are not in daycare. And it would be outrageous to suggest that they should.

## Fundamental legal principle

The privacy of the family home has been at the foundation of British law for generations. I was reminded of the immortal words of William Pitt the Elder from 250 years ago:

*The poorest man may in his cottage bid defiance to all the forces of the crown. It may be frail – its roof may shake – the wind may blow through it – the storm may enter – the rain may enter – but the King of England cannot enter.*

The Durham scheme seemed to reverse the fundamental principle of British law that we are presumed innocent until proven guilty.

We were eager to discover the legal basis for this approach and so requested a copy of Durham Police's policy and guidance. But the answer came back:

*We do not have a policy or guidance document in relation to this project; this is simply a multi-agency partnership collaboration to do 'the right thing', an ethos espoused by [the] Chief Constable.*

Here we have another example of the 'parental state' weighing up what is best for the child – and, on this occasion, doing so on the hoof.

### Parliamentary Question

Interestingly, the activities of Durham Police seem to have prompted a Parliamentary Question. At the beginning of May, Baroness Jones of Moulsecoomb asked whether the government planned to 'use police to visit the homes of home-schooled children who have not been in contact with public services for a set amount of time'.

Thankfully the ministerial reply was more in line with the spirit of William Pitt than Lady Brook. Lord Agnew stated:

*There are no such plans. If there are concerns about the safety or well-being of a child who is being educated at home, local authorities already have a range of powers available under the Children Act 1989 (The Act), which allow them to seek a court order to access a family home. The Act includes provision for the police to remove a child to suitable accommodation where there is reasonable cause to believe that a child would otherwise be likely to suffer significant harm.*

*The police can also provide assistance to local authority staff in an emergency. These powers apply for any child, whether educated at home or at school, but only where a child is in need of emergency protection.*<sup>4</sup>

This is certainly an area where ongoing vigilance is required.

### Public consultation

The government has recently concluded a 12-week consultation on elective home education in which it invited comment on two draft guidance documents: one for parents and one for local authorities. If you compare the current guidance for local authorities with the new draft guidance, you would think that there had been a seismic change in primary legislation. They are that different.

But in reality there hasn't been any change in the law relating to education 'otherwise' than at school at all, and the government is currently not proposing any change in the law. Yet the guidance suggests a radical change of attitude that

could lead to a level of intrusion into family life that has not been known in the UK before.

The European Convention on Human Rights is clear: 'the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions' (Article 2, Protocol 1). However, the draft guidance for local authorities interprets this to mean merely that 'the wishes of parents are relevant'.<sup>5</sup> Not paramount, just 'relevant'.

### An antidote

One thing that the past 40 years has demonstrated over and over again is that the state is ill-equipped to take the place of a parent. Where it has usurped the role of parents and assumed parental responsibilities, the result has been disastrous.

And so, having begun with one of Valerie Riches' favourite quotes, let me close with two favourite quotes of my own, which provide something of an antidote to the words of Lady Brook:

The first is from the 2016 Supreme Court ruling on the Scottish 'Named Person' scheme:

*'The first thing that a totalitarian regime*

*tries to do is to get at the children, to distance them from the subversive, varied influences of their families, and indoctrinate them in their rulers' view of the world. Within limits, families must be left to bring up their children in their own way.'*

And the second is from an American social commentator:

*'[We should be] very cautious of recommendations decreasing the role of parents and increasing the role of the state in family life... Children's rights theory claims to promote the welfare of children. But in reality it throws children into the arms of state professionals—who may be filled with big ideas but empty of the bonds of family love.'*

### Notes

1. *The Times*, 16 February 1980.
2. *Daily Telegraph*, 5 September 2017.
3. *The Times*, 28 April 2018.
4. HL, Answer to Written Question HL7460, 16 May 2018.
5. Department for Education, *Elective home education, Departmental guidance for local authorities: draft for consultation*, April 2018, para 9.3.

## Fundamental British values

**The draft home education guidance undermines parents and exalts the power of the state at their expense in many ways, but I'll limit myself to a few comments on British values.** According to the Department for Education, fundamental British values consist of 'democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs'.

But the million dollar question is: What does mutual respect and tolerance entail? Does it mean that I must respect and tolerate *people* with whom I fundamentally disagree, or does it mean that I must respect their *beliefs* and approve of their *conduct* as well? At our conference in 2015, Professor John Haldane noted that:

*'The word toleration has been reinterpreted. Toleration is the primary virtue in the context of disagreement or difference. It allows us to live with people with whom we disagree. But in recent years, toleration has shifted to become approbation and approbation has shifted to become celebration. Intolerance is now defined as refusing to celebrate something with which you disagree.'*

Professor Haldane called it 'a corruption of language'. And yet that is the way that the British value of 'tolerance' is frequently being interpreted by statutory bodies, including the educational establishment.

For example, in her 'muscular liberalism' speech at the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership earlier this year, the head of Ofsted, Amanda Spielman, commended faith schools which were 'exemplars in promoting tolerance, not just of different faiths, but *also lifestyles and cultures as well*' (emphasis added).

What does this have to do with home education? Simply this: While the new draft guidance for local authorities states that 'there is no requirement on parents to actively promote the Fundamental British Values, as there is for schools', the new draft guidance for parents states that: 'to be "suitable", education at home should not directly conflict with the Fundamental British Values defined in government guidance'.

In other words, there is a very real danger that 'British values', as interpreted by a politically correct education establishment could be brought to bear upon home educating families as part of the local authority's assessment of their education provision.

You can be quite sure that if such intrusion into the family were to begin with home educating parents, it certainly wouldn't end there. Over the course of time, the state is likely to take a growing interest in the influences that *all* children are subject to in the home.

# Lessons on family policy we can learn from the United States

Dr Patrick Fagan

**Advances in technology are driving cultural change throughout the world. Historically, new advances have been made slowly and rarely, allowing people time to adapt to them. However, the current pace of change is unsettling established patterns of life, and further technological developments are likely to transform cultures to an even greater extent.**

In the face of radical cultural change, parents will have to identify likeminded families who share their values and their philosophy of family life, with whom they can associate. No matter where people stand on the moral spectrum, this is a human need. We shall all need to find our communities of faith, values or life orientation in order to raise our children in line with our convictions.

As life becomes more frenetic, setting aside time for family and community is going to become a major issue. One of the biggest deficits or negatives of the technological culture is that it has driven out time. We have more labour-saving devices than ever before, and yet we all complain that we have less time. The machines that we have created have taken over and we are struggling to keep up with them.

Time is essential to build relationships: marriage needs time for conversation, and parents need to spend time with their children in order to establish a relationship with them and influence them. We need to protect time in order to protect our relationships.

## The major institutions

Historically, there have been five major institutions in society that fulfil five basic tasks: the family, the marketplace, government, the school, and religion. (Even those who do not subscribe to a religious faith still have the task of working out a philosophy of life.) Each of these institutions developed over time and all began in the family. In our own lifetime, health-care has emerged as a sixth institution, as medicine has become specialised. But each institution is rooted in the family.

Each of these institutions taps into a different capacity. The government, for example, specialises in force (e.g. the police, courts, prisons, the armed forces), and education specialises in intelligence, but the family is the institution that specialises in sexuality. It is only through the complementarity of the sexes that children can be conceived and born. A father is therefore entitled to say to the teacher, 'Since I am the man who brought this boy into existence through the sexual act, I am uniquely equipped to educate him in the area of sexuality.'

Where fathers speak to their sons about sexual matters, and mothers their daughters, they can have a huge impact. Public policy is secondary to the input

that parents should have into the lives of their own children in the privacy and sacredness of the home. Children will learn more about sexuality from observing how their mother and father relate to each other, without a word being spoken.

We need to teach our sons to respect women because they have the capacity for motherhood. If a man is going to be a good lover of his wife in adult life, he needs to learn self-control over the sexual. Pornography presents a serious threat to the sexuality of boys and their future marriages, and the use of pornography is increasing among girls and women too.

## Change through relationship

Three of the major institutions are deeply relational: the family, the school and religion. Government and the marketplace are more instrumental. During my time as Deputy Assistant Secretary for the family and social policy at the US Department of Health and Human Services, where I had access to the largest depository of evaluation data on government social problems, I observed that there is not a single government social behaviour-changing programme in the United States that works.

At the local level, there are micro programmes that have some measure of success, though they rise and fall depending on staff, leadership and needs. But where they work, they do so in an idiosyncratic way. Cookie-cutting a programme doesn't work. The success of social programmes is dependent on the love of the giver for the receiver. The person in need must be in receipt of a dedicated service.

In a therapeutic context, it is essential that the patient clicks with the therapist. The relationship between them is the vehicle through which change occurs. But you don't go to the government for relationships. You go to the government for justice. The main function of the government is to *protect* the different



**Dr Patrick Fagan**

institutions, not to *grow* them. It is a massive strategic mistake for the government to try to operate behaviour-changing programmes.

The government has completely failed in the realm of sex education. Not a single programme has delivered what it is supposed to deliver. The same is true of marriage programmes. At a national level they are not working. The real change will take place in the relational spheres of family, school and religion.

The primary role of the government is to protect and to punish violation. The campaign group Mothers Against Drunk Driving was very effective in reducing rates of drunk-driving, not through social programmes, but by getting the law enforced.

Social science has established beyond any doubt that marriage is the foundational relationship in society. Yet we face the ill-will of people who have no interest in the truth and refuse to accept the facts. In academia, many social scientists are closing their minds to data that do not fulfil their presuppositions, but any social scientist worth his salt will grapple with the data that doesn't fit his view of things.

## Effects of the sexual revolution

There has been a considerable rise in divorces and out-of-wedlock births since the 1950s. In the United States, only 46 per cent of 17 year-olds are living with their biological mother and father. (Among African-American 17 year-olds the percentage is as low as 17 per cent.) There has been a marked increase in the number of fatherless families, where girls often have the model of a mother who is doing her best for her children, but boys have no role model. Girls are now outstripping boys in all areas of education. This is bad news for marriage, because girls do not generally marry down.

The 1994 Family Education Trust (FET) report, *Broken Homes and Battered Children*, demonstrated that the intact married family is the least likely family structure to witness child abuse. The incidence of serious child abuse is 33 times greater in a home where the biological mother is cohabiting with her boyfriend than in a home with married biological parents. The United States National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect had not previously measured child abuse by family structure until it was persuaded to do so on the basis of the findings of the FET study in the UK.

The American study found that rates of sexual abuse are 19.8 times higher in homes headed by a biological mother and her boyfriend compared with a home headed by married biological parents, and five times higher in an intact cohabiting family. Rates of physical abuse were also 10 times and 4.3 times higher respectively than in a natural married family.

The feminist lobby doesn't like to admit it, but statistics demonstrate that the traditional intact married family is the safest place for women too.

### Religious observance

The United States is the only country in the world with survey data that measures the effects of religious observance as well as family structure, and the evidence shows a positive association between weekly attendance at a place of worship and beneficial outcomes in terms of academic achievement, family mealtimes and abstinence from sex outside marriage. Religion has a protective effect in the areas of sex, alcohol and drugs.

These findings have public policy implications. At a time when religious liberties are under threat, we need to press for religious observance to be included in the key population surveys, so that the benefits associated with it can be brought into the public debate. In view of the positive outcomes, the government should be in the business of protecting marriage and religious freedom.

The government has lost sight of its chief purpose, with the result that more and more people are becoming fearful of an intrusive state. The fundamental role of the government is to keep the bad guys out and leave the others free to do the good. The social science data can assist us in making the case for being allowed the freedom to have a positive impact on society through our families and religious communities.

• **Dr Fagan is Founder and Director of the Marriage and Religion Research Institute (MARRI) in Washington DC.**

## Alive to the World prepares to expand

**Alive to the World provides a programme for character and personality development aimed at children and young people. It was conceived and developed to follow and enhance the natural stages of childhood and adolescence, and to be used in classrooms from kindergarten to the last year of secondary school.**

The curriculum features an ongoing story about Charles and his cousin Alice and their friends, and invites pupils to think about their world and discuss the options and choices that they face at each stage of their lives.

Louise Kirk reported on plans to extend the Alive to the World curriculum materials beyond Year 8 in order to cover the upper years of secondary school. She is working in association with young people and professionals and inviting feedback on drafts in the process of preparation. Mrs Kirk's 25 year-old daughter is working on the story-telling portions of the new material. Good progress is being made, but it will take some time to complete the project.



• <http://alivetotheworld.org/en/>

## Challenge Team goes international!

Sue Relf

**The Challenge Team recruits teams of young adults and visits schools up and down the country with an interactive, hour-long presentation that explains to pupils aged 13+ why saving sex for marriage has so many benefits.** This is our fourteenth year and we visited 39 schools and three youth groups speaking to 7,400 young people. The total number of students who have heard a presentation since 2004/05 has now reached over 154,000. 84 presenters have been trained, and 758 school visits made to date.

This year we received an unexpected invitation to spend an all-expenses paid week in Malta where our hosts arranged for us to visit nine schools and one youth group. The teachers and pupils were amazed and delighted with the presentation and its convincing message. 750 pupils sat in stunned silence. Their education is in English, so there was no language problem. Life Network is considering inviting us back as the tour was such a success. If we return with an English team I would want to train a team of Maltese young adults and a Maltese Co-ordinator while there. Life Network also has contacts in Italy.

A media engineer in Eastbourne has offered to create a video of our presentation. Filming has taken place and we expect the video to be ready in September. Each DVD will contain two presentations. The cost will be £25 per DVD for individuals, or, with the follow-up discussion materials, £50 for schools. Although nothing can quite beat a live presentation, DVDs offer flexibility. They are long-lasting, can be passed around and shown at any time.

We continue to receive excellent feedback from pupils and teachers alike. Recently a teacher at a school in Essex walked straight up to the team after the presentation and told them that it was the best presentation she had seen in 23 years. Another teacher at the same school praised us for the variety of imaginative methods we used to keep the students attentive and engaged throughout.

At present we do not know how we will be affected by the introduction of statutory Relationships and Sex Education in secondary schools. However, as it is often RE, rather than PHSE, departments who invite Challenge Team, the new legislation may not affect us.

We are preparing to tour again next year and are currently recruiting new presenters for November 2018 and/or March 2019. As our secular and sexualised culture stretches its tentacles ever further into the hearts and minds of our children and young people, our material is needed more than ever.



• <https://challengeteamuk.com/>

# Statutory Relationships and Sex Education: Exploring the moral complexities

Dr Olwyn Mark

In recent months Western culture has experienced a renewed crisis in how we relate to each other sexually. The #MeToo Campaign has burst open a tide of anger and long-held resentment about how individuals have experienced the sexual responses and behaviours of others. But in a *Radio Times* article, Mariella Frostrup asked if we are losing our sense of proportion as we throw every act of perceived sexism into the #MeToo basket.

It raises the question: By what measure do we judge behaviours to be appropriate or inappropriate? Is there an objective standard by which behaviour amounts to sexual harassment and assault? Or is my subjective judgment sufficient? Is it enough for me to *feel* sexually violated?

Perhaps we can agree with Harvey Weinstein's lawyer that offensive behaviour does not equate with criminal behaviour, but where do we start in tackling offensive behaviour? And whose measure of offensive do we apply?

In a BBC report last year, a 24 year-old secondary school teacher spoke of her shock at the degrading language used by boys to discuss sex and sexual acts. For their part, girls were not taught to respect their bodies and didn't comprehend the notion that they may be being used. She referred to 'an infected generation that no longer sees the gravitas of sex'.

## Cultural mood

In a culture where an expressive individualism is the moral norm, individuals are not finding sexual freedom, but experiencing disrespect, degrading behaviour and sexual brokenness.

We have tragically lowered the bar of sexual morality to the point that our public conversations revolve around whether a behaviour satisfies the legal requirement of consent as set out in the criminal law.

This cultural mood has created an opportunity to reignite and contribute to the public debate, in order to explore what behaviours and qualities of character contribute to the good of the individual and the good of society.

In a policy statement announcing its decision to make Relationships and Sex Education statutory in secondary schools, the Department for Education stated:

*'Given the increasing concerns around child sexual abuse and exploitation and the growing risks associated with growing up in a digital world, there is a particularly compelling case to act in relation to pupil safety.'*

It is argued that in its aim to avoid recognised harms and pursue beneficial outcomes, the government is pursuing a lib-

eral values-neutral ideal in sex education. But no policy approach to RSE is neutral or uncontroversial.

In exploring the adequacy of our current approach to policy formation, there are three questions to be considered:

- What is the 'harm' that RSE is seeking to address?
- What is the 'good' that RSE is seeking to promote?
- What might a renewed vision of the 'good' look like for RSE?

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*"If we reduce morality to consent we are, in effect, socialising and educating young people to sleep with strangers."*

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## The 'harm' that RSE is seeking to address

RSE policy has been largely driven by concerns about teenage pregnancy and STIs. New Labour viewed teenage pregnancy as a social exclusion issue and sought to address the socio-economic cost of teenage sexual behaviour. Its agenda was intended to move away from moral judgments to an evidence-based position, but in its definition of the problem or harm it was seeking to address, it was itself making a moral judgment.

Are we defining young people's negative sexual outcomes too narrowly when we limit them to teenage pregnancy and STIs? The focus on confidential services, including sexual health and abortion, has narrowed our understanding of harm. With the increasing focus on child sexual abuse and exploitation, we are already seeing an expansion of our understanding of the harm of teenage sexual behaviour. But if we were to move beyond health outcomes towards a more holistic understanding of young people's relational and emotional wellbeing, we might arrive at a different cost-benefit appraisal of the right policy approach.



Dr Olwyn Mark

## The 'good' that RSE is seeking to promote

To date, a liberal understanding of moral education has dominated the moral discourse surrounding RSE. The 'informed choice' approach says that we are to educate children towards independence and self-sufficiency where young people are perceived to make free autonomous choices. It presumes that young people have the innate ability to reason morally and to act accordingly.

This is perceived to be a morally neutral approach to education that nurtures freedom, equality and rationality. But in reality it is not possible to promote rational decision-making, without first providing young people with moral resources or starting points from which to do so. We are not as rationally autonomous or sexually autonomous as we might think or wish.

Within an 'informed choice' approach there is the option for young people to say 'No' to sex, but any moral guidance as to when and in what circumstances it might be morally prudent to say yes and no is deemed prescriptive and an infringement of individual liberty. It is assumed that sexual activity is a normal and inevitable stage in the development of young people.

Provided sexual activity is consensual, and ideally pleasurable, it is regarded as moral. According to Peter Singer, sex is morally neutral. He writes:

*'Sex raises no special moral issues at all... Decisions about sex may involve considerations of honesty, concern for others, prudence and so on, but there is nothing special about sex in this respect, for the same could be said of decisions about driving a car (In fact the moral issues raised by driving car, both from an environmental and from a safety point of*

view, are much more serious than those raised by having sex).

Ethicist John Harris agrees. He argues that there is nothing wrong with sex of any kind, so long as the act does not involve violation or exploitation. The teaching of consent therefore becomes the moral imperative in RSE and subjective pleasure is the highest end of sexual activity. Pleasure is accordingly taking an increasingly prominent place in discussions on sex education.

But the common understanding of sexual morality, which argues that anything goes, providing it is in private, between consenting partners and harms no one else, is both incoherent and inadequate for shaping a public sexual ethic and appreciating its meaning and purpose. If young people have no understanding of the 'good' of sexual behaviour, they are vulnerable and ill-equipped to exercise their moral agency and navigate the cultural terrain.

As Christian Smith observes:

*'Emerging adults can jump into intimate relationships, assuming that sex is just another consumer item, recreational thrill, or lifestyle commodity. But many of them soon discover the hard way that sex is much more profound and precious than that.'*

Ultimately the problem with our current understanding of human sexuality and morality is that it is telling us a story that is inconsistent with who we were made to be and what we were made for. As the 24 year-old teacher noted, 'We have lost the gravitas of sex.'

### **A renewed vision for RSE**

We need to help young people to critically evaluate the moral messages that are presented to them and encourage them to exercise discernment so that they do not simply slide into relationships. We can help them recognise that they are more than their sexual instincts and that the reason that most young people still want to get married is because we were designed for emotional intimacy and fidelity.

If we reduce morality to consent we are, in effect, socialising and educating young people to sleep with strangers. A renewed vision of good in RSE will teach young people social skills to build healthy and worthwhile relationships, including relationship skills that centre around commitment, communication and conflict resolution.

Rather than merely warn against the danger of unplanned pregnancy and STIs, we will want to present a more positive message about the goodness of sexual intimacy in the context of a lifelong marriage. By teaching young people

what is good, we can encourage them to aspire to what is good and to go on to live out what is good. Our aim should not be to suppress and neutralise their passions, instincts and emotions, but rather to order them towards a vision of the moral good and an understanding of sexual virtue.

While there is often a disjuncture between sex and love in the modern culture, a Christian understanding of sex is expressed in the context of a lifelong and exclusive marriage. Casual sex is a contradiction in terms within the Christian narrative. A Christian perspective therefore has the potential to enrich the teaching of RSE in schools.

Young people need to be presented with a moral vision for their sexual lives that is not derived from experience or instinct. Rather, they need to be presented with a more coherent vision of what it is to be truly human. In this way, choices become inspired and not merely informed.

● **Dr Mark is Head of Research and Strategic Partnerships at Love for Life in Northern Ireland.**

**Copies of her book, *Educating for Sexual Virtue: A Moral Vision for Relationships and Sex Education* are available from the office at the reduced price of £30.00 inc p&p (rrp £42.50)**

## **RSE update**

**Earlier in the year, the Department for Education issued a call for evidence on Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, which attracted over 23,000 responses.**

The government has said that it will 'shortly' publish the results of the call for evidence. At the same time it will publish draft regulations and statutory guidance which will be put out to consultation.

At the time of going to press, we do not know how prescriptive the draft regulations will be and how much scope there will be for parents to influence what is taught in their own local school. There is, however, certainly a strong commitment on the government's part to ensure that the curriculum is LGBT-inclusive.

### **Perennial questions**

At the heart of the present debate are the perennial questions:

- Who is responsible for determining what children need to learn about sex and relationships: parents or the state?
- What is Relationships Education and what is Relationships and Sex Education?
- What are they seeking to achieve?
- And whose morality should be taught?

## **Lovewise: continuing to uphold marriage**

**Dr Liz Jones reported that Lovewise continues to have opportunities to give presentations in schools, and its resources remain in demand from parents, schools and churches. The organisation has been particularly encouraged by the number of schools which have bought the presentation *Pornography - dangers and decisions*.**

A new website – Lovewise Online – has recently been launched, aimed at presenting young people with 'a better narrative about relationships, sex and living wisely' from a Christian perspective. The website may be accessed at [www.LovewiseOnline.org](http://www.LovewiseOnline.org)

Dr Julie Maxwell spoke about a school which had asked her to omit the section on marriage from a Lovewise presentation. However, after she had explained the importance of providing teaching on marriage, the school allowed her to go ahead, while permitting parents who objected the right to withdraw their child.

In her letter, Dr Maxwell explained that she had started teaching about marriage because, as a community paediatrician she constantly witnessed the impact of family breakdown on children.

While she had no wish to stigmatise children in different types of families, she firmly believed that they need to understand what marriage is and how it relates to having children. Unless children have had specific family experiences, they usually assume that relationships and marriage are between a man and woman; that is what most of them aspire to and what the majority will experience.

Dr Maxwell concluded that in the same way that we teach children about healthy eating and saying no to drugs, smoking and alcohol etc, we should also be teaching them about the healthiest option for relationships and having babies. For that reason, she did not believe that it was right to talk about conception and babies outside the context of marriage.



# New study finds sex education 'may be doing more harm than good'

A review of research evidence on the effectiveness of school-based comprehensive sex education (CSE) in the United States has concluded that it has 'essentially been ineffective' and has 'produced a concerning number of negative outcomes'.

Researchers from the Institute for Research & Evaluation found that the strongest and most recent outcome studies do not support the claim that CSE has been 'proven effective' nor that abstinence education is ineffective. They also found that the evidence for abstinence education, while limited, looks more promising.

The researchers surveyed studies contained in three authoritative research reviews of US sex education effectiveness—two sponsored by the US federal government and one conducted for the United Nations.

They found no evidence of sustained reductions in teenage pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections, and no evidence to support the claim that CSE brings the 'dual benefit' of increases in both teenage sexual abstinence and condom use by sexually active teenagers.

## Call for a global rethink

In a companion study the same researchers examined the evidence for school-based comprehensive sex education outside the US, with reference to the 43 studies of 39 school-based CSE programs found on the reference list cited by UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, 2018. However, the reviewers found no support for UNESCO's claim that school-based CSE is effective. In fact, they state that,

*'UNESCO's own evidence indicates that CSE in school settings has shown little success and may be doing more harm than good. Policymakers should examine the discrepancies presented here between the research findings and UNESCO's claims of CSE success, and rethink the global dissemination of CSE in schools.'*

The researchers further reported that:

*'There is very little evidence of real effectiveness (sustained effects for the intended population) on any sexual health outcome (pregnancy, STDs, condom use, etc.), and the evidence of success at CSE's purported dual benefit of increasing both abstinence (i.e., delayed sexual initiation) and condom use in adolescent populations is virtually non-existent...'*

*'This overall pattern of findings is similar to the one found for CSE in U.S. schools. The studies cited by UNESCO – both in U.S. and non-U.S. settings – do not support its claim that "the evidence base for the effectiveness of school-based [CSE] continues to grow and strengthen" nor does the research support UNESCO's assertion that CSE "does not increase sexual activity, sexual risk-taking behaviour or STI/HIV infection rates." The UNESCO database demonstrates that CSE in schools has not been an effective public health strategy and in non-U.S. settings it may be doing more harm than good.'*

• Stan E Weed & Irene H Ericksen, *Re-examining the Evidence, The Institute for Research & Evaluation. Part One: School-Based Comprehensive Sex Education in the United States (September 2017); Part Two: Research Findings in Non-U.S. Settings (May 2018)*

## Thank you, Lady Grantchester!

At our Annual General Meeting in June, Betty, Lady Grantchester stood down as a trustee of Family Education Trust after almost 40 years of faithful and devoted service. Lady Grantchester joined us way back in 1978, and became a trustee of the Responsible Society Research and Education Trust (as it was then known) in September 1981.

Since that time she has been a highly valued member of the board and we have greatly benefited from her wisdom, experience and careful attention to detail. Her interest in the work remains undiminished and she plans to stay in close touch during her retirement.



Lady Grantchester, pictured with Family Education Trust trustee Dr Joseph Lim and director, Norman Wells.

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