

Going Further Getting Started

Sex and Relationships Education for learners with additional needs at Colleges of Further Education

by Image in Action

Image in Action is a not for profit company which has been working in this area for over twenty years alongside college staff to create practical and engaging methods to support young people with additional needs to access Sex and Relationships Education effectively.

- This resource, *Going Further; Getting Started*, gives staff a framework of why this work is needed, how to set up a programme and what to include in it.
- Staff can then follow the link to the Image in Action website www.imageinaction.org where they will find the 12 week *Going Further Sex and Relationships Education* course for learners with learning disabilities presented in detail including session plans, with activities, methods, and picture resources.
- The *Going Further* course has been developed following years of direct work in FE colleges and offers staff ideas for working with learners who have moderate learning disabilities or autism spectrum disorders such as Asperger's syndrome. With adaptation, some of the activities can also be used for learners with severe learning disabilities.



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Introduction



Suddenly, there they are. Surrounded by strangers, in an unfamiliar building, they have to make sense of this new world. It's not surprising that our learners with additional needs require help to cope with it all. It may be their first real taste of freedom and independence, their college will be a busy place, with people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences, studying a variety of courses. And all these learners are at a stage when sexual awareness is very much a part of life.

But our learners with additional needs will need some specific teaching to help them flourish in the social and sexual world around them. It will be up to us to show them how to develop their relationship skills and their confidence with friends and others; to explain to them that people's feelings are just as important as what they do; and to equip them with knowledge and understanding to keep them safe in an exciting though often bewildering new world.

There are many learners with additional needs at FE colleges, perhaps with learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, physical disabilities who may receive some input about social skills or other issues but many colleges are unsure how to tackle Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) with them. Although SRE is not mandatory, colleges are being encouraged to deliver it.

Ofsted's Inspection Framework includes 'Being Healthy'. To achieve an 'Outstanding' grade requires "that learners' attitudes and behaviours are changed significantly towards healthier lifestyles ... reflected in a significantly improved or very high uptake of ... sexual health services ... together with improved emotional resilience of learners."

In this resource we hope to offer staff a way of approaching this important area of work that encourages confidence to make a start. We recognise that it is not necessarily a straightforward undertaking but we hope that this resource will guide you to taking steps to supporting your learners with additional needs through Sex and Relationship Education.

- Learners with additional needs benefit from extra input when they find themselves in the FE college environment
- SRE can offer the chance to develop skills and knowledge in assertion, relationships and sexual health
- Ofsted's Inspection Framework supports such work in FE colleges
- College policies can underpin this work as they promote equal opportunities, anti-discrimination and safeguarding

Contents

- This resource gives staff a framework of why this work is needed, how to set up a programme and what to include in it.
- Staff can then follow the link to the Image in Action website www.imageinaction.org where they will find a 12 week SRE course for learners with additional needs presented in detail including session plans, with activities, methods, picture resources and lists of other useful resources.
- The Going Further course has been developed following years of direct work in FE colleges and offers staff ideas for working with learners who have moderate learning disabilities or autism spectrum disorders such as Asperger’s syndrome. With some adaptation, the activities can also be used for learners with severe learning disabilities.
- Staff may use the whole course as it is set out, or choose to use only some of the sessions depending on the needs of their learners. There is a lot of material and staff may want to spread it out for longer than 12 weekly sessions, giving time to consolidate learning before progressing to the next topic.

“It was a bit daunting to start with, but as we went along I realised that the Going Further course was a step by step development, building on other inter personal work I already did with my students. What kept me going was how well they responded and how clear it was that this was just what they needed at the right time in their lives.”

FE college tutor

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Getting started

Learners' needs

The core rationale for undertaking this work is that learners with additional needs who require learning support may need specific and targeted help with sex and relationship issues. An analysis of need can be undertaken across a tutor group, according to the learners' age, or course.

(See **assessment checklist in Going Further course**, www.imageinaction.org)

The Going Further course

The Going Further course will give staff the key elements in a programme of support for these learners. The programme covers a range of topics with session plans, activities and resources that can be undertaken over a term. It is intended for use with groups of learners perhaps within a weekly group tutorial session or as part of a social skills or SRE programme. It can be found by following the link to the Image in Action website (www.imageinaction.org).

Who is it for?

Going Further is suitable for foundation level learners and those on skills for independence courses and some vocational courses. It can link to ASDAN courses and may also be useful for learners integrated into other courses (perhaps those with autism spectrum disorders, ASD) who may need additional support with social skills or others who may have missed out on SRE at school.

Management

It's vital for senior management staff to recognise the importance of this work and support it. The course can be incorporated into the college curriculum to flourish. Senior management will recognise that if learners

EXAMPLE

*Joe asks "will she be my girlfriend?"
Ella thinks "how can I get rid of him?"*

Joe, an autistic young man, fixes all his attention on Ella, one young woman at college. He frequently follows her in the corridors and canteen, standing too close to her, even sniffing her, to her discomfort and embarrassment and others' amusement. He takes to following her into town after classes, and she thinks she ought to complain about his behaviour to her tutor.

- Why do you think Joe is doing this?
- Should Ella complain to her tutor?

How could the Going Further course help?

By learners working on public and private behaviour and personal space, understanding what is meant by consent, learning about the steps in making relationships and how to understand own and other people's emotions and body language.

are confident in their social skills and friendships and have the knowledge and understanding to help them make good choices to benefit their intimate relationships and sexual health, they will thrive in all areas of college life and learning.

Senior management in discussion with teaching staff can decide where this work best sits within the overall college curriculum; as part of the on-going tutor group input, or as a specialist and separate course. The course we offer here is designed as a weekly SRE programme over at least 12 weeks with a consistent group of learners and staff.

Policy

What we teach will accord with the ethos of the college and our work in SRE can underpin and exemplify relevant college principles and policies on:

- confidentiality
- equal opportunities inclusion and diversity
- anti-discrimination
- safeguarding vulnerable adults and children
- supported learning
- Sex and Relationships Education (though not required by law).

There may be an SRE policy already in college as a whole or as part of the Supported Learning Department, though this is not mandatory. If not, it will be worthwhile starting to produce one, as a sign of establishment commitment and a reference to good practice.

The values dimension – how do we encompass difference?

SRE is not value free, and we all – learners, staff, parents, the wider society – have our own views and beliefs. We have to ensure that our learners' beliefs are respected while showing the range of views in our society. If SRE is to be undertaken and a policy not adopted, another approach would be to align it with the college's own Values statements on equality and diversity and add input on how this will be approached in SRE.

A note on the law as it applies to people with learning disabilities

In general, the law says, there is the same treatment in law regarding sexual matters for people with learning disabilities as for others; for instance regarding age of consent for sexual intercourse, age of marriage, divorce. Differences relate to the ability to give consent.

EXAMPLE

“In College A, a secular approach will be taken to the values dimension for SRE, calling upon the UK legal framework.

On specific topics: there will be opportunity to discuss the range of views in society but the college's position is that topics will be taught according to the law and therefore what is deemed appropriate across UK society.

- the age of consent is 16 for all sexual activity, whether homosexual or heterosexual
- abortion is legal in the UK up to 24 weeks
- no marriage or civil partnership is to be entered into without full understanding and consent from both parties, forced marriage/civil partnership is illegal
- etc”

A key element of the law relating to people with learning disabilities is to find the balance between risk taking, protection and support.

“There are many ways in which people can be given help and support to enable them to make their own decision.... The practicable steps to be taken might include using different forms of communication, providing information in an accessible form, or treating an underlying medical condition to enable the person to regain capacity.”

The Mental Capacity Act 2005

(A useful resource from fpa.org.uk is ‘**Learning disabilities, sex and the law, a practical guide**’)

Outside agency support

There are agencies outside the college which can help with your plans. In many areas there may be experienced staff working locally in health or education who are especially interested in projects to promote sexual health for young people; national agencies like Brook and FPA have materials and provide training. Some disability organisations produce materials and can be a valuable source of advice. (See useful organisations on page 14 of this resource.)

Staff

So who will lead the group? There may be someone on the staff who has received SRE, social skills or group work training – great! But many teachers have excellent empathy, flexibility and differentiation skills, all essential. Learning support assistants can be invaluable and help to maintain consistency for the transferability of learning for the learners outside the sessions. Other staff such as learning mentors, nurses, counsellors may all have relevant expertise and be willing to be part of the core group promoting this project.

It is important that everyone who participates in delivering this programme is committed to it. It cannot be something staff are obliged to do to fit in with timetable considerations. It is sensitive and sometimes complex work that requires a willingness to join in with activities, present a role play, use explicit words and describe sexual activity in a way to minimise embarrassment. This can be too daunting for some staff whilst to others this seems an exciting and rewarding challenge to undertake.

Preparation for staff

- Attend courses about SRE, sexual health, social skills, group work provided by organisations with knowledge in this area; Brook and FPA are examples of national training providers but there may be local organisations in your area. It is ideal if the training is about working with learners with special needs but other SRE courses may also be helpful and can be used with adaptations.
- The local council, learning disabilities partnership or advisers in the health services could all be sources of training.



- Identify other staff within the college who could provide some training even if it is half an hour after college; the college nurse or a sexual health worker at a linked clinic.
- Familiarise yourself with SRE practice through websites; the Sex Education Forum at the National Children’s Bureau has a practice notice board that showcases good practice ncb.org.uk/sef
- Identify, purchase and familiarise yourself with resources (**see page 14 of this resource for organisations that produce resources**), work out what style will work for you.
- Familiarise yourself with the Going Further course on the Image in Action website www.imageinaction.org, imagine yourself leading the first session. What would you actually say to introduce the course or describe an activity for the group?

Establish a Going Further team

- Those who will directly deliver the course, at least two members of staff to team teach and plan the direct work, model activities in the session for the learners, and support each other if there are complex issues or questions raised. Also to witness the sessions for each other in case of a difficulty or a complaint being raised.
- Those who will manage the staff who deliver the course, able to offer support and advice, lead feedback and review sessions to underpin reflection and ongoing evaluation.
- Include a college nurse or sexual health advisor to offer specific input to the team or on the course such as about condom use and contraception, sexually transmitted infections.
- A member of senior management to back the project through the hierarchy of the college.

Working with parents, carers and families

Our learners are now at college. Many will believe that their parents do not need to be informed about their choices or courses. This independence is to be applauded and supported where possible. However if the learners are under 18 or their learning disabilities make them particularly vulnerable adults then we need to take into account the family context. This dilemma is captured by the Head of Supported Learning in a London FE college:

“It’s all very well to say they are adults now but if my learner’s mum found out that she had not been told about her daughter attending the sex education course she might well make sure her daughter doesn’t get a lift that day to college. If we have explained the purpose and content of the course she would probably go with it. We have to work with the realities of learners’ lives and sometimes that means a different kind of partnership with them and their families.”

We would recommend a letter explaining the whole programme of study that term and including the Going Further course be sent to parent/carers to keep them informed about what is going on in general at college and how the SRE fits in. Emphasize the assertion and safety agenda and the careful, confidential nature of the group, with a request to contact staff at the college if the parent/carer has any questions or issues about any of the work. Appropriate information is shared which we believe respects all parties. We would not however regularly discuss the progress or individual learner responses with parents/carers, though general progress may be discussed at an annual review with the learner present and with their permission.

Starting the group

Some suggestions to provide an effective foundation for the Going Further course:

- It takes a carefully balanced approach to engage a group of young learners on the subject of SRE at this time of their life. A group work approach is most productive. So what will be the number in an ideal group? Not too many, not too few: 8–12 is about right.
- Think about gender balance: having only one learner of either sex in a group can be uncomfortable for learner and staff members.
- It is useful to consider how the group members will ‘gel’ together. Just because learners are the same age does not mean they are the same maturity, have the same needs or require the same information. Too many noisy, chatty, seemingly streetwise learners may overwhelm the quieter ones.
- Before any work can begin with learners, a structure for referral should be agreed. The course could take place with one regular group of learners such as a tutor group or learners on a particular course. This would probably work best for timetabling, however, the dynamic of the group may work better if learners are selected according to their needs and abilities.
- Who is responsible for what? A member of staff may take primary responsibility for the logistics of the group, booking rooms, gathering resources, reminding learners of when it is happening, writing the letter for parents/carers whilst another takes responsibility for directing the sessions following the Going Further course.
- The group is both confidential and private though at the beginning it will be important to be clear with the learners that should anything come up that

EXAMPLE

Rita asks “we really fancy each other, but should we have sex?”

The tutor says “how can I talk to them about sex and relationships without overstepping my role as a tutor?”

Two students Malk and Rita, with moderate learning difficulties, spend a lot of time together at college and fancy each other. They feel like they want to take it to the next level and have sex. A tutor comes across them kissing in an empty classroom.

- What do the learners need to think about as their relationship is developing
- What might the tutor say or do?

How could the Going Further course help?

By distancing the issues from Rita and Malk by presenting the steps in developing a relationship between young people in general emphasising and the nature and consequences of making a decision to engage in a sexual relationship. It can help learners by using stories and characters to explore the emotional element, discussing feelings, the nature of intimacy and commitment, the need for good communication, consent and privacy, the importance of good sexual health and contraception. A personal tutorial could then follow up these issues with the couple if it was felt that direct intervention was needed.

Talking Together ... about Sex and Relationships and *Talking Together ... about Contraception* are useful resources to consult about these issues from www.fpa.org.uk.

concerns the staff about learner well-being or safety, they may need to discuss with a member of senior management. Be clear about the monitoring of each session and if an end of term report is to be written that it includes the general content and outcomes of the course, rather than comments specific to individuals.

- Establish clear management support, so that lines of accountability are understood and transparent.

Setting up the group sessions

There are some essential elements of a successful course:

- a regular, secure meeting place which is not shared or interrupted
- a consistent group: both learners and staff
- a routine 'ritual' format, known and familiar to all
- ground rules agreed to by all participants, to be recapitulated at each session
- an understanding by staff of 'distancing techniques', to ensure all understand the boundaries of the session and its educational, not personal, nature
- team teaching, to offer ongoing support and guidance.

And what will we teach them?

The box on this page lists the elements of the Going Further course available to download free in PDF format (www.imageinaction.org).

The course can be adapted and extended for use with many different groups. The Going Further course shows the plan for each session and what resources you will need for each one. It describes the activities in detail and explains how to present them to your group of learners.

- **Session one**
Group building, establishing ground rules and boundaries of the group, assessment of learners' knowledge of SRE
- **Session two**
Relationships I; Friendships
- **Session three**
Relationships II; Attraction and trust
- **Session four**
Relationships III; Dating
- **Session five**
Qualities of a relationship: respect, choice and assertion
- **Session six**
Development of a loving relationship
- **Session seven**
Intimate relationships; consent and keeping safe
- **Session eight**
Making choices about sex; resisting pressure
- **Session nine**
Condoms to prevent unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections
- **Session ten**
Accepting difference and addressing homosexual discrimination
- **Session eleven**
Sexualisation, manipulation and pornography
- **Session twelve**
Evaluation and ending the course



So how do we teach SRE?

The 12 week Going Further programme is based on a group work approach which uses active learning techniques to help with practise of skills and confidence building. There are a number of key methods used in this approach.

- **circle work** so each participant can see everyone, no tables between them give the Going Further course a different atmosphere from some others in the college
- **group building**, activities to develop trust and acceptance of other group participants
- **ground rules**, to establish a framework for behaviour and to establish the nature of this work “it’s important to listen to each other” “it’s ok to say the names for private parts of the body in the group”
- **interactive games** for participants to engage with each other and the topics, have fun and see learning as a process
- **distancing techniques** to ensure that participants feel safe and not ‘put on the spot’ personally in the sessions; such techniques include referring to what young men and young women do/feel/learn rather than ‘you’ the people in this group. It could also include using characters and stories with names unassociated with group members “What would Sabrina say in this situation, how would Matt react?”
- **drama and role play** so participants can practise different situations and reactions, learn and change, try out a different approach or way of being, see a situation from another’s point of view
- **storytelling**, using characters close to the learner’s own experience and develop story lines they can identify with e.g. Sabrina can visit the local clinic to the college and find out what happens there, the group can advise her as she is feeling nervous
- **case studies** presenting studies of a young people with issues similar to those of the group and the participants can analyse how they reacted or make suggestions for how things could be different
- **using pictures** (from SRE resources or magazines) and props (e.g. pharmacy products for work on hygiene and being attractive)
- **ritual** (beginnings and endings of sessions are the same to provide stability), recap and reflection (to build learner confidence that they are progressing and assist staff in knowing what has been learned)

There is more information on methods on the Image in Action website and in the books it has written eg *Lets Do It*, *Lets Plan It* and *The Confidence Factor*
www.imageinaction.org

EXAMPLE



Jess says “no one will be my friend”

The others say “she is so irritating, why can’t she leave us alone?”

Jess is ignored and sometimes bullied by a group of learners. Jess hangs around with the group even when they tell her to go away. They make unkind remarks about her hair and clothes and say they will put unflattering photos of her on the internet for everyone to see.

- **Why does Jess continue to hang around with this group?**
- **What can Jess do to change things?**
- **How can the group of learners either accept Jess into their group or make it clear that they don’t want to be friends with Jess without being unkind or bullying her.**

How could the Going Further course help?

By using a group process that encourages members to respect and value other people, while also recognising differences. It would discuss feelings and the consequences of actions so that learners would understand how their behaviour affects others. It would help Jess to understand about the nature of different types of relationships including friendships and what she has a right to expect about how people should treat her. Jess can learn assertion skills and communication skills that would help her to find other people who will want to be her friend.

Assessment, monitoring and evaluation

Every college will have its own methods of monitoring and evaluating progress and learning. Here we offer three structures that can be used:

- 1 We recommend monitoring of every session with a plan following these headings:
 - Overall aim of session
 - Objectives
 - Session content
 - Strategies for inclusion/differentiation
 - Overall evaluation of the session e.g. progress and learning
 - How did the session achieve its objectives?
 - Issues arising from the session
 - Where next?
- 2 An end of course review could be held considering the following points which could then be produced in report format:
 - Group composition
 - Needs
 - Group structure and organisation
 - Aims
 - Session content
 - Methods used
 - Strengths and benefits
 - For the group members
 - For staff
 - For the college
 - Weaknesses
 - What has been learned?
 - Future development
- 3 An assessment checklist can be found as part of the Going Further course link to www.imageinaction.org which would give a baseline at the beginning of the group from which learning could be assessed at the end of the SRE programme.

Self assessment by learners

Learners with additional needs may require clear and accessible ways of helping them to offer assessment and feedback of their learning and experience of the SRE input and these could include:

- using props to remind them about particular activities or topics and to encourage their comments,
- peer interviewing about their favourite and disliked activities,
- completing picture based feedback sheets perhaps with support from staff,
- quizzes with prizes to assess knowledge,
- rating staff, activities or methods according to a scale of 1–10 or liked to disliked,
- asking them for solutions to case studies to indicate their understanding of social situations.

In the Going Further course you will find an assessment activity at the end of every session for learners. Session 12 contains a number of assessment formats to evaluate the whole term's programme.

Conclusion

- We hope you are encouraged to make a start on SRE or to develop your existing SRE programme. We believe this work will help to give answers to some of the challenges you may face with your learners by addressing social and sexual issues in a regular, matter of fact progression using tried and tested methods.
- This work can provide a foundation for dealing with issues that can avoid a rushed crisis response when a problem suddenly arises.
- It can develop learners' skills to navigate the less regulated setting of college and manage the risks of this new independence.
- It can increase their awareness of their choices and rights so developing their confidence and reducing their vulnerability.
- It can develop their assertion and communication skills so giving them ways to reject bullying and encourage them to make and keep friends.

To access the Going Further course, free to download from the Image in Action website, click on this link:
www.imageinaction.org

Resources

The Healthy FE website on the Excellence Gateway will provide signposting to a number of supportive areas in sexual health and emotional wellbeing
www.excellencegateway.org.uk/hfep

From Image in Action

Let's Do It; creative activities for sex and relationship education for young people with learning disabilities

Rebecca Johns, Lorna Scott and Janet Bliss

Let's Plan It; a planning guide for sex and relationships education for young people and adults with learning disabilities

Lorna Scott and Sarah Duignan

The Confidence Factor, creative activities for young people with special educational needs, 11–16 to support their learning about assertion, friendship, bullying, relationships and sexual health

Sarah Duignan, edited by Lesley Kerr-Edwards

Published by Image in Action www.imageinaction.org tel: 01494 481 632

From FPA

Talking Together ... about growing up

Talking Together ... about sex and relationships

Talking Together ... about contraception

Three books by Lesley Kerr-Edwards and Lorna Scott, Image in Action

Published by FPA www.fpa.org.uk

Other resources and useful organisations

There are useful organisations that publish resources for those working with people with learning disabilities. Many have specific resources for Sex and Relationship Education for people with learning disabilities, some may have other resources that can be adapted. The websites below will give details about what is available from the organisations and how to order from them.

www.fpa.org.uk

www.brook.org.uk

www.me-and-us.co.uk

www.change-people.co.uk

www.lifesupportproductions.co.uk

www.tacade.com

www.niace.org.uk

www.asdan.org.uk

www.barnardos.org.uk

www.bild.org.uk

www.bodysense.org.uk

www.bristol.ac.uk/norahfry

www.ncb.org.uk

www.pavpub.com

www.jkp.com

Sheila Hollins: *Books Beyond Words* can be found at www.amazon.co.uk